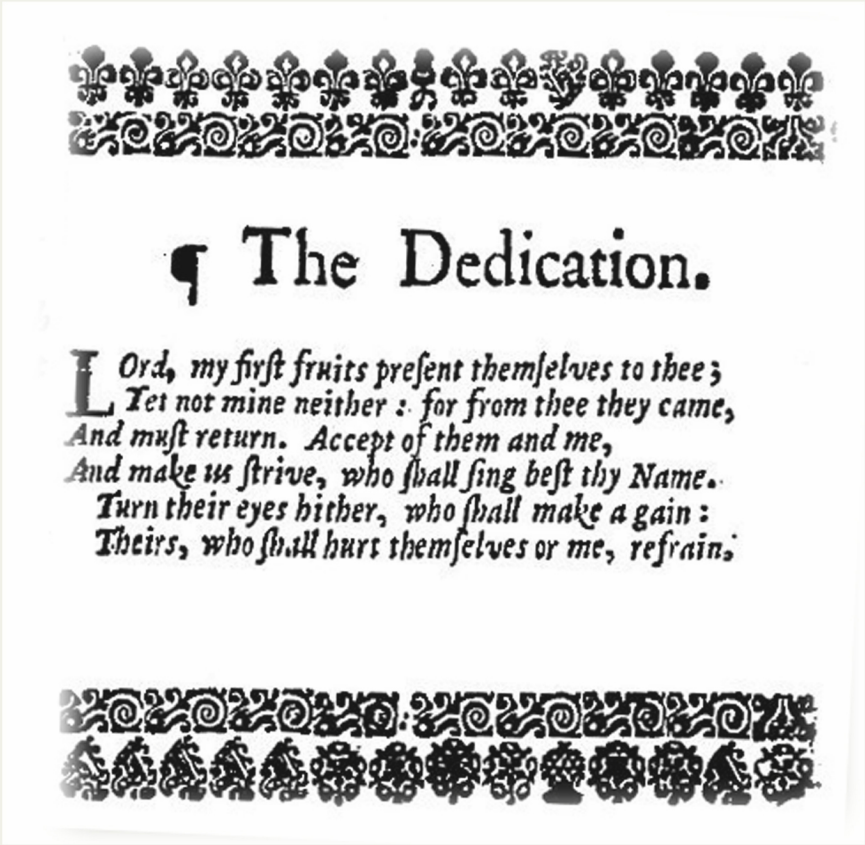
Bernard Sharratt

LITERARY CONVERSIONS



¶ The Dedication.

LOrd, my firſt fruits preſent themſelves to thee;
Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came,
And muſt return. Accept of them and me,
And make us ſtrive, who ſhall ſing beſt thy Name.
Turn their eyes hither, who ſhall make a gain:
Theirs, who ſhall hurt themſelves or me, refrain.

New Crisis Quarterly

LITERARY CONVERSIONS

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LITERARY CONVERSIONS

Bernard Sharratt

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For
Donald MacKinnon
Fergus Kerr
Nicolas Lash
who once taught me
much but failed
to convert me

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On George Herbert's *Dedication*

FOREWORD

This short book contains just two linked contributions, reprinted from two previous books but now juxtaposed to bring out their connections. I have always had some difficulty in judging how far others will find what I write too simple or too difficult. These pieces perhaps exemplify different faults: the first assumes that it is insultingly unnecessary to spell out at length the contours of an overall argument, the second perhaps offers too elaborate an unfolding of a rather basic starting-point. I also apologise for my over-use of 'quote marks' —but not, I'm afraid, for believing that some of the considerations and arguments remain—despite the now-quaint and *passée* idiom of some of the voices in play—still of considerable importance.

The 'review' of *Literary Conversions* (an imaginary book, of course, as with all *NCQ* reviews —see below) explores a variation on a theme: that what we call literature can often be regarded as a textual transformation of an actual set of social relations or practices. In this case, the basic suggestion is that some literary texts involve their reader in a process which is akin to the curious logic involved in a religious or other conversion. In other words, a process so constructed that the participant finds him or herself following a sequence of experiences or considerations, to the point where, in order to make sense of continuing in that process, they have to accept retrospectively a premise or foundational position which has not been explicitly established. The only alternative to such on-going assent is to leave the process altogether — or, in the textual re-positioning of this process, to abandon and repudiate any further engaged reading of the text. Which also applies, of course, to this text.

The rather anodyne notion that reading literature can demand 'a willing suspension of disbelief' is thus given a perhaps unexpected and specific lease of life. The reviewed book ranges widely, though focussing particularly upon four texts: a short poem 'Prayer' by George Herbert, the novel

Pamela by Samuel Richardson, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, and T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. It should perhaps be said, however, that the implications of this argument are intended to extend beyond the mere reading of literature, into the ways in which we can often be converted to a range of political, cultural and economic belief-systems.

Another short poem by Herbert is the subject of the much longer 'Voices Reading George Herbert's *Dedication*.' This extended exercise in highly idiosyncratic analysis takes the form of an artificially constructed seminar discussion, in which the fictive participants offer an unexpected, indeed perversely unpredictable, range of critical, philosophical, theological and political responses to what might have appeared as a merely harmless exercise in versifying. As the series of seminar interventions proceeds, of course, the reader of this discussion will, perhaps, be prompted to ask him or herself how far they too are being drawn into another variation on the process of literary conversion. Which, if any, of the proferred voices you find acceptable, interesting, or even tolerable, is, of course, your decision.

Both contributions are reprints, the review from *Literary Labyrinth* (1984) and the seminar from *Reading Relations* (1982). In their original contexts the unusual form of both pieces was related to other aspects of those books, but it seemed worthwhile to bring them together now in a combination which may suggest the implications of both analyses for some newly current issues, among them the significance of several forms of fundamentalist belief structures and their underlying logic.

The imprint 'New Crisis Quarterly ' revives another title, that of an exceedingly short-lived periodical: its first, only, and farewell issue appeared in 1984, under the guise of *The Literary Labyrinth*. Its editorial programme was to publish reviews of books I didn't feel I had the time actually to write. Both the variously named reviewers and the variously authored reviewed books in *Literary Labyrinth* were therefore wholly imagined, but readers were invited, if so inclined, to write the books themselves.

That original invitation to readers remains, to complete a work if they so wish: in this case, the partly failed and partly defeated attempts of my generation of literary critics to make the relations between literary criticism and politics a viable and effective contribution. Other preoccupations have succeeded ours, but the underlying problems persist and in the present context, another new crisis perhaps, some of those previous emphases and approaches are worth, I think, recalling or even reviving.

B.S.
May 2015

LITERARY CONVERSIONS:

studies in the religious ideologic of literature

by John Joseph Andrews.

Reviewed by Lawrence Fielding

Dr Andrews has written an intriguing rather than wholly convincing work, though by the logic of his own curious argument this unsatisfactory result should perhaps count as success more than as failure. His theme is conversion but for him conversion is a suspect process, to be analysed with a wary scepticism. His own work correspondingly appears not quite to wish to convert its reader to Dr. Andrews' own way of thinking. This reader at least can report its considerable success in that respect.

There are four main chapters, each with an appendage of fairly brief *excurses*, somewhat in the manner of the once influential but now neglected *Revaluation* of Dr. F. R. Leavis. The main body of each chapter offers a diligently, even tediously, 'close' reading of a single text, while each *excursus* outlines a more general but associated thesis, whether historical, psychoanalytical or literary-critical.

The overall aim is to examine 'ways in which certain literary texts are so structured as to entice or trap their readers into a change of mind, a reformation of view, a conversion', and Dr. Andrews presents these essays as contributions to a larger, two-fold inquiry; into what he calls the 'ideo-logic' of literary texts and into the 'trans-position' of certain social practices into 'textual strategies'. Though I found some of the individual analyses worth serious consideration, these larger ambitions and terminological in-

novations strike me as extremely dubious. Since, however, they also seem to me very secondary to the substance of the book, I will in fact forgo any treatment of them here.

The first essay—which I will consider in some detail—worries away at a short poem by George Herbert that I have always regarded as pleasing and harmless; it is entitled 'Prayer (I)' in Hutchinson's sadly superseded edition:

> Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,
> Gods breath in man returning to his birth,
> The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
> The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;
> Engine against th'Almightie, sinners towre,
> Reversèd thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
> The six-daies world transposing in an houre,
> A kinde of tune, which all things heare and fear;
> Softnesse, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,
> Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,
> Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,
> The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,
> Church-bels beyond the starres heard, the souls bloud,
> The land of spices; something understood.

For Dr Andrews there lurks in that last phrase, 'something understood', a deep and devious device, the import of which is that the poem itself is something *not* understood. Not at first glance, mind; it is only after devoted critical attention that the poem ceases to be understood. (A sad paradigm perhaps of fashionable critical practices?)

As Dr Andrews takes us through the poem in detail (twice), those apparently lucid analogues dissolve into grammatical ambiguities (line 2: 'his' birth as man's or as 'its'?), directional uncertainties (line 4: do plummets go down or up?), and metaphysical conundrums (line 1: how old are angels ?). Even more drastically, prayer becomes a kind of blasphemy (a siege-engine assaulting God, a new Babel, a Jovian thunderbolt hurled back to heaven, a jab into the dead Saviour's side) — though some of these disrespectful suggestions can be theologically redeemed by appropriate exegetical effort (the spear in *John* ch. xix releases sacramental succour in eucharistic blood and baptismal water), or by appeal to seventeenth-century emblem books (where prayers are already arrows shot into the very eye of God). Other lines are revealed as quivering with multiple associations ('Heaven in ordinarie' yields at least five distinct senses), or as too bafflingly simple to delineate any properly illuminating 'definition' of prayer (line 9 suffers from this); while still others defeat our best attempts at clarity (line 7) or at appropriate interpretation (the phrase 'and fear' in line 8 proves intractable).

Penultimately, we are taken into a mysteriously impermeable, even mystical, region of meaning as we try to attach some specific sense to prayer 'as' the milky way, bird of paradise or land of spices. Even with the footnoted help of seventeenth-century astronomers, ornithologists and carto-graphers, Dr. Andrews confesses, gladly, to a definite impenetrability in these closing images — which he then claims as reinforcing his insistence that the closing phrase 'something understood' is an even more bafflingly opaque conclusion.

His point is, perversely, that in attempting to 'understand' these preceding images the reader is brought to an awareness of the weirdness, the slippery difficulty, the peculiar oddness of that very process we call 'understanding': are we sure that we have 'understood' even one of these phrases fully, adequately, appropriately? Even more, do we know (and if so how do we know?) that we

have ‘understood’ what is constituted by this total combination of compact images? At the end of our analysis do we any better ‘understand’ what ‘prayer’ is?

At this point Dr. Andrews' analytical screw tightens: to understand the poem fully we would finally have to understand the final phrase: ‘something understood’ — and to do that we would have to understand what understanding is. And, as Dr. Andrews legitimately, but a shade maliciously, reminds us in an extended footnote to this chapter, that task preoccupied and, arguably, defeated seventeenth-century philosophers from Descartes — whose *Discourse on Method* was published only four years after Herbert's *Temple* — to Locke, whose *Essay on Human Understanding* closed the century on a note of common sense and therefore uncertain optimism.

So far, I find this critical exercise rather enchanting, though to some extent derivative, but Dr. Andrews then takes a sharp step further, into the more rarefied air of linguistic (or is it logical?) philosophy and offers us an exhausting analysis of the logical (or is it linguistic?) paradoxes of the term ‘understanding’. I can only grope after him here, but he seems to conclude, first, that since any complete understanding of anything involves understanding everything, only God (if s/he exists) could claim that ‘something’ was, for her/him, ‘understood’, so only God could be said truly to pray (an odd but also biblical conclusion: consider *Romans* viii: 26); and secondly, or conversely, that if prayer is ‘something understood’ then to understand this poem would be to pray it, to read it ‘as’ a prayer.

In my admittedly amateur response to this logico-linguistic disquisition, I must confess to thinking that Dr Andrews has actually mis-understood his own conclusion here, as well as playing some rather shifty games with the word ‘something’ (which one can, in fact, understand quite well in the seventeenth-century sense of ‘partial’).

Albeit, he concludes that the serious reader of this poem is finally faced with a dilemma (he calls it a 'double-bind', utilising a term from Gregory Bateson): *either* the reader tries to understand the poem as a definition of prayer, but this involves the impossible or paradoxical task of understanding understanding and therefore the reader can never understand what prayer is, even though the poem ostensibly sets out to tell us what prayer is; *or*, the reader gives up trying to understand the poem and therefore, if he continues trying to read the poem at all, opts for trying to read it 'as' a prayer — even though he has by now acknowledged that he doesn't understand what prayer is, in other words doesn't understand what it is he's attempting to do in 'praying'.

It is here that Dr Andrews finally locates, and pounces upon, what he calls the 'conversion tactic' of the poem. He sees the reader of the poem as having been brought to the point of jettisoning his 'understanding' in favour of a 'belief' (a belief which takes the form, however provisional, of attempting to 'pray'), and that 'belief' is, fundamentally, an acquiescence to an authority, the authority of the poem itself. By that he means—to put it over-concisely perhaps—that the title changes its significance for the reader: we took it to indicate that the poem offered a definition of prayer, now we accept it as indicating that this poem is itself a prayer; and if we accept the title in that latter sense, all we can do with the poem is attempt to pray it, not even understanding what it is we are doing but, to pun mildly, simply accepting Herbert's word for it.

Of course, the trap doesn't quite close on us: we needn't read the poem at all, or we could (try to) read it 'simply as a poem'. Rather curiously for a literary critic, the stern Dr. Andrews rejects this latter option as a weak-minded 'liberal' position, a gesture typical of twentieth-century indifferentism (he clearly has Dante's antechamber in mind). Instead he urges upon us the 'radical' response of demolishing the poem (he calls it, in a quaintly faded idiom, 'deconstructing'), by analysing the 'ideo-logic' underpinning the very possibility of prayer in order to conclude

(predictably) that 'prayer' (both the poem and the act) can't finally be 'understood' at all, since its intelligibility rests upon the ultimately unintelligible premise of there being a God to pray (to) in the first place.

This rejection of the so-called 'liberal' literary critic's approach is far too off-hand, in my view, and I will return to it, but at least this first chapter has effected part of its aim: I now admit that Herbert's poem does have a twist in its tail that I hadn't previously been fully alert to, though it may gladden Dr. Andrews' rather cold heart to know that I don't fully understand that twist even now. Looking back at the poem again, for example, I recognise that in all my previous readings that marvellous phrase 'Angels age' had been registered by me as an ambiguous paradox, with perhaps three possible meanings—but I am unable to decide which meaning I actually 'understand' as I read the poem. In practice, I leave all three hovering, if only because I know that I don't really understand the notion of 'angel', let alone the problem of how angels can have time in their lives — even if praying is, for them, having the time of their lives.

However, let us at this point digress briefly, as the book itself does, and look at the *excurses* to this chapter. The first is appealingly neat, but spurious. Illustrating further what he means by the 'authority' of a text, Dr Andrews instances the *Oxford English Dictionary* itself. He succinctly recounts its history (its 'ideological context and intended authoritarian function' as he sourly and characteristically puts it), and argues — if that is the word — for the 'unprecedented paedagogical control' exercised over the living growth of the language by this 'exercise in sterilising and halting history' (his particular *bête noire* here seems to be those teachers who conscientiously correct spelling mistakes). *Au contraire*, I would have thought: the *OED* has given us a history of word-use we had no previous access to.

His angry demolition of T.S. Eliot's polemical appeal to the *OED*'s definition of 'definition' in the epigraph to *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* is to me merely an unconvincing exercise in adolescent anti-authoritarianism.

As for Dr Andrews' instancing of the logical *mise-en-abyme* involved in the *OED*'s 'definition' of the word 'as' as including the phrase 'as in', such unavoidable hiccups, far from illustrating the 'vicious circularity of ideo-logical closure', indicate no more than that Wittgenstein was correct in defining meaning as use. It certainly needn't undermine our use of such phrases as 'as a poem' as Dr. Andrews seems to think. After all, it is not the task of the *OED* to teach its readers how to speak the English language in the first place—it is written *for* such speakers—and an awareness of how 'as' is used is necessary to competence in speaking English, though resort to the *OED* might refine and clarify our grasp of that use. One might, incidentally, apply these remarks, *pari passu*, to the vocabulary and activity of 'praying'.

His other *excurses* are more interesting. The second traces the history of 'interpretation' from biblical exegesis through literary criticism to the contemporary hermeneutical debate in theology, the philosophy of science and post-Heideggerian philosophy and social theory, in order to clarify the difference between reading 'Prayer' as a literary critic (concerned only with textual interpretation) and as a potential convert (one whose engagement with the text opens up a genuine challenge to believe or to reject belief).

The first mode he sees as, historically, a recent invention, that of the 'complacent and uncommitted bourgeois spectator-consumer of an inert culture' (his venomous prose really is appalling), while the second is shown to be 'more thoroughly traditional', linking across the centuries Talmudic and Patristic commentators, Puritan autobiographers and German phenomenologists, for all of whom texts *mattered*, made sense only as demanding application in one's actual or at least mental-spiritual life. (One thinks of the young Georg Lukacs passionately arguing about *Crime and Punishment* with his comrades during the Budapest Soviet in 1919, to decide whether they should execute political hostages or not!) This compressed *excursus* is indeed historically illuminating, even though Dr. Andrews' own position seems awkwardly to

straddle precisely these two options, since he apparently rejects *en avance* the 'ideo-logic' he analyses while still getting very angry indeed about it — a surely inconsistent response.

The third *excursus* is a kind of historical insertion into this overall sketch. He traces the practices of seventeenth-century Puritan and Anglican interpretation of the Bible as personally applicable, and labels this 'textual paranoia' (emphasising thereby the intense threat of biblical texts for those who divided mankind into saved and damned). He then links this to the 'political paranoia' of a civil war (in which 'those who are not with me are against me' and indifferentism is excluded). He further binds together these 'subjective' and 'objective' features of the period by means of an adaptation of Jacques Lacan's early theory of aggressivity: that the root mechanism of paranoia is the projection of an ideal-ego which, in the seventeenth century, was articulated as God Himself whose 'aggression' then took the form of pre-destination, which in turn led to textual paranoia, the purpose of which was to discover one's own pre-destined fate in an applied reading of the scriptures.

There are some useful sidelights scattered here, concerning the broader context of Herbert's poem (for example, the significance of Puritan objections to Anglican preaching styles, that — in a contemporary phrase — they 'prevented understanding'), and also a suggestive critique of some twentieth-century theories of 'ideal-speech communities' (for example, Jurgen Habermas's version of Critical Theory) which hold out the illusory possibility of aggression-free 'rational' societies. For the gloomy, materialist and class-conscious Dr. Andrews (relying here upon Dr. Lacan's doctoral thesis), since paranoia is at the root of all knowledge and 'understanding', it is Hobbes rather than Habermas (still less Hooker), seventeenth-century civil war rather than twentieth-century scientific social theory (still less spiritual enlightenment), that seems to provide the best guide for our political thinking. It's a depressing, perhaps even paranoid, viewpoint.

A lengthy fourth *excursus* entitled 'Milton's Options' situates Milton as a defeated revolutionary poet in the context of Restoration literature. The three options Dr Andrews proposes to examine are correlated with the three major poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. The first he sees as an attempt to 'understand' the eventual defeat of 'God's party', and the thesis he advances is that Milton came to see that defeat — the Restoration — as necessary.

His argument hinges on the traditional theological problem of the very possibility of Adam's ever 'falling' at all. The familiar formulation is: how could a non-fallen individual ever commit a sin without this implying some 'evil' (i.e. some degree of fallen-ness) 'prior' to the act of sin? Recognising that such a formulation is open to various traditional reformulations which dissolve the problem away, Andrews argues that even allowing these established qualifications and re-definitions, the paradox of the possibility of the fall still remains (he interestingly compares it to the paradox involved in the notion of consciously observing oneself through the moment of falling asleep). He prefers to credit Milton with a radically un-traditional answer to the problem. He suggests that Milton presents Adam as 'falling' not because of some prelapsarian evil or sinfulness in him, but precisely because of what is most (humanly) praiseworthy and good in him: his love for Eve.

In itself, this is a fairly familiar reading of this moment in the poem, but for Andrews its significance is far-reaching. For him, what must characterise genuine human love is the willingness to *risk the loss* of something for the loved one — but in the world of Eden the only thing that could be risked was Eden itself. But to risk Eden knowing that Eden would not in fact be sacrificed, because God would ignore or forgive Adam's choice to follow Eve in tasting the forbidden fruit, would not be a genuine risk at all, an act of real love. The only real risk open to Adam was to risk the loss of Eden, for the sake of his love of Eve, while knowing in advance that the loss of Eden was definite — and he could

know that because of the very nature of the God whose command he had disobeyed: such a God does not make empty threats. The element of risk, of uncertainty, lay in what was to happen after — and that was unknown.

Now, it seems to me that Dr Andrews has not only ignored the distinction advanced in *Paradise Lost* itself between love and mere passion but has manipulated the notion of 'risk' to fit a dubious general thesis. He proposes that what makes the 'true revolutionary' is always 'a commitment to a revolutionary action even if that action is bound to be defeated.' He instances James Connolly going out to die in the Dublin Easter rising of 1916, Che Guevara embarking on a doomed *foco* strategy in Bolivia in 1966-7, even Lenin and Trotsky quoting Engels to each other on the night of the storming of the Winter Palace — to the effect that they had already lost.

Applied to John Milton after 1660 there is perhaps a germ of psychological plausibility to Dr. Andrews' suggestion. Milton had to reconcile two notions: not only that God was on the side of the Puritans but that God knew 'in advance' that they would be defeated. In personal terms this problem of God's paradoxical Pro-vidence meant that Milton himself, even knowing *post eventum* that the Revolution had indeed been defeated, still would not retrospectively repudiate his commitment to that revolution. Milton's post-Restoration position had to be that *even if* he had *known* in 1640 that the Restoration would happen in 1660 he would still have fought as he did, still have served as Cromwell's Latin Secretary, still have written his highly risky pamphlets, even on the eve of the Restoration itself. For Dr. Andrews, *Paradise Lost* represents Milton's attempt to understand the most basic grounds for holding to that paradoxical or apparently point-less position.

That Milton continued to hold to his pre-1660 commitments is clear, so Dr. Andrews argues, from both *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. The focusing of *Paradise Regained* upon the Temptations of Christ is Milton's response to the temptation of succumbing to the

Restoration, of switching allegiance and settling for a compromised life; that such a temptation was as unappealing (or impossible) for Milton as Satan's were for Christ is what makes the poem so relatively flat. In a scornful survey of Restoration culture and entertainment, Dr Andrews offers us the speculative vision of John Milton writing a comedy of manners or turning out epilogues to Dryden's plays, perhaps composing drinking songs or Grub Street satires. Yes, that option *is* inconceivable.

But if Milton after 1660 refused either to repudiate the revolution or to accept a position within the Restoration, what remaining options as a poet did he have — apart from silence? According to Dr. Andrews, Milton had somehow to create a work which could neither be suppressed (as an outright opposition work would be) nor appropriated, a work that precisely by affirming both Milton's own greatness as a poet and his deliberate self-distancing from the ethos of Restoration culture, would serve notice upon the world of the political unacceptability and cultural poverty of the counter-revolution.

All three works can be seen as, in part, having this aim, but Dr. Andrews emphasises how particularly *Samson Agonistes* matches this option: a work which combines classical Greek tragedy with an Old Testament theme and forges a unique artistic unity from those two sources of Christian civilisation, a work it would be impossible to fault artistically or to suppress politically (despite the clear and dangerous possibility of localised political interpretation), yet equally a work it would be impossible to present upon the Restoration stage. Again, there is a certain psychological plausibility to this account of what Milton might have been intending in writing *Samson Agonistes* (though there are more persuasive accounts available!) but it is certainly implausible to claim that he succeeded!

In one respect, Dr. Andrews recognises that, even on his own argument, this 'option' failed, since *Samson Agonistes* was indeed appropriated and tamed to a safe place in counter-revolutionary culture, in the form of Handel's oratorio. More

broadly, however, he argues that Milton's entire work after the Restoration was finally rendered harmless and acceptable to the 'reactionary cultural regime' (a regime he actually sees as lasting unbroken to the present!) — precisely by being treated as 'Literature'.

At last, the putative relevance of this long *excursus* becomes apparent. In the attempt to assimilate Milton, recognising the towering stature of his work yet refusing its political challenge, the Restoration had to (re-)invent the very notion of 'Literature' as distinct from other forms of writing, 'endowing "Literature" with such exalted sublimity that it became quotidianly irrelevant and with such profundity that it became practically meaningless' — a process that was soon, and irremediably, to infect and engulf even the 'Classics' themselves. Addison's treatment of *Paradise Lost* in the *Spectator* encapsulates the successful consolidation of this attempt, simultaneously dissolving Milton's political meanings and establishing his 'literary' supremacy. But, as Dr. Andrews goes on — in an oddly sour way — to argue, Milton had already been responsible for creating a 'radical' concept of 'Literature' in writing the unperformable *Samson Agonistes*, but the significance of that sublime distancing from the everyday to be found in the 'preface' was in fact disdainful political critique of the culture, not complacent critical appreciation of the work.

In concluding this long *excursus* Dr. Andrews suggests two figures for us to compare with Milton. One is Alexander Blok, whose *The Twelve* remains both the greatest and the most politically enigmatic of all responses in 'literature' to the 1917 Revolution, appropriable neither as fully for nor as against the revolution. The second is Arnold Schoenberg, whose uncompromisingly 'difficult' music Dr. Andrews — following Adorno — sees as exemplifying a radical distancing from possible appropriation by the 'bourgeois culture industry' which Andrews regards as in continuity with, and even originating from, Addison's efforts.

There is at least a minor difficulty with Dr. Andrews' argument in this excursus: that if the concept of 'Literature' is a post-Restoration notion, what on earth were all those pre-Restoration authors writing? He has the grace to acknowledge this troubling question in an aside in his next *excursus* — the fifth and final one to this first chapter of the book — where he recognises that George Herbert's *The Temple* has 'often, but mistakenly, been taken to be a work of Literature'. But if *The Temple* is not a work of Literature, what are we to read it as? As a spiritual diary, a set of meditations, a book of prayers, a collection of poems?

He first surveys the various critical positions concerning the ordering or structure of the work, arguing that none of the usual candidates (architectural, moral, liturgical, autobiographical) actually matches the real diversity of conjunctions and dissociations of subject-matter confronting the consecutive reader of the work, and then probes those poems which themselves discuss the practice of writing ('Jordan' I and II, 'The Quidditie', etc.) to conclude that no criteria derived from these poems can be consistently applied to the whole text. He then, however, offers his own candidate and set of criteria. He singles out 'The Holy Scriptures' I and II as providing the reader with both explicit model and implicit instructions for reading *The Temple*. For example, the lines

> O Book! infinite sweetnesse! let my heart
>
> Suck ev'ry letter, and a hony gain

are taken as alerting us to that unexpected phrase within the poem

> thou art Heav'ns Lidger here

where the capitalised 'L' and the odd 'i' (where one might expect 'e') require us to ponder the various senses of 'ambassador', 'commissioner', 'ledger', 'register'. More generally, such poems as 'Paradise' only yield their specific theological sense if we do indeed 'suck every letter'. 'Holy Scriptures II' formulates the very problem posed by the apparent lack of structure in *The Temple*:

> Oh that I knew how all thy lights combine
> And the configurations of their glorie!
> Seeing not onely how each verse doth shine,
> But all the constellations of the storie.

But then, for Dr. Andrews, the poem goes on in the next verse to provide a kind of solution:

> This verse marks that, and both do make a motion
> Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie:
> Then as dispersèd herbs do watch a potion,
> These three make up some Christians destinie.

Just as the Bible itself (the model of 'the Book') offers not a single 'order' but an infinite variety of possible readings, since each reader will find therein (guided by God) precisely its personal message to that individual reader—the paranoid reader of the second *excursus* finding that three widely scattered verses add up to a shatteringly specific revelation — so the only 'structure' *The Temple* has is a deliberately kaleidoscopic one (Herbert trusts to God's chance), leaving the particular concatenation appropriate for any individual reader to be arrived at by that reader:

Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,
And comments on thee: for in ev'ry thing
Thy words do finde me out, & parallels bring,
And in another make me understood.

Somewhat like a paranoid reader himself, Dr. Andrews of course fixes upon that word 'understood', and argues that, in the light of this poem, together with 'Prayer' ('something understood') and the claim in 'The Dedication' that reading the (divinely-inspired) *Temple* will modify the fate of those who read it, we have to see *The Temple* as insisting that any attempt to 'understand' it involves 'understanding' one-self and that the only adequate form of self-understanding is '*metanoia*' — the *New Testament* term for 'conversion'. A change of mind can only be a change of heart.

But if understanding involves conversion, conversion involves a change in the basis upon which we understand, a change which then validates the understanding that led to conversion. Dr. Andrews concludes this *excursus*, and his chapter, by remarking that *metanoia* is, in that respect, akin to paranoia: once you think you're being persecuted, everything that happens shows that you are —i.e. the premisses of the argument become the conclusion, and *vice-versa*. It's one way of arguing, I suppose, but hardly the only route to conversion, literary or otherwise?

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The second chapter of *Literary Conversions* moves on to the eighteenth century, with a detailed reading of Samuel Richardson's novel, *Pamela*. Fortunately, the 'close reading' analysis is confined to Volume I only. Dr. Andrews begins with a nicely chosen comment on Pamela, from the heroine of Henry Brooke's novel of 1774, *Juliet Grenville*:

> I think, madam, that the author has much of nature in him; and touches the passions, at times, with a tender and happy effect: but then, I blush at the manner in which he undresses our sex. Indeed his ideas are much too frequently and unnecessarily wanton. Neither can I wholly approve the title of the book: can virtue be rewarded, by being united to vice? Her master was a ravisher, a tyrant, a dissolute, a barbarian in manners and principle. I admit it, the author may say; but then he was superior in riches and station. Indeed, Mr Richardson never fails in due respect to such matters; he always gives the full value to title and fortune.

The problem Dr. Andrews extricates from this double-barrelled onslaught is that enshrined in the sub-title of Richardson's novel, *Virtue Rewarded*. How can Mr B. be or become a 'reward' for Pamela's virtue when he begins the novel as a would-be rapist? Richardson's basic strategy for resolving this problem, according to Dr. Andrews, is to have Mr B. read through Pamela's letters and journals; Mr B.'s reading, in effect, converts him to a true and respectable love. But — and here Dr. Andrews' scalpel begins to quiver with analytical anticipation—the reader of *Pamela* has also read precisely those same letters and journals, so should not the effect of that reading, also, be a 'conversion' of the reader?

Of course, this 'textual strategy' and its 'logic' —though undeniably, as other critics have perhaps noticed, there— isn't quite that simple, and accordingly Dr. Andrews takes his tweezers to the text. He dissects at length the various local varieties and variations of 'reading' by which the reader is enticed, from the first Letter in which Mr B. reads Pamela's writings in her presence (a foretaste of the future), through the often quite complicated embeddings of other letters within Pamela's (those from Mr B. to Pamela, to her parents, to Mrs Jewkes, or from Reverend Williams to Pamela, John's note, the false warning from Lady D., etc.,

etc.) to the culminating phase of the novel when we find ourselves reading Pamela's speculations about Mr B.'s reactions to her previous journal entries which he is supposedly reading even 'while' we read her further instalments about his reading!

This detailed unpacking of the superimposed layerings of readings and writings within the text leads Dr. Andrews to insist that Pamela is not (as is often claimed) 'writing to the minute' but rather is writing retrospectively in a double sense: she is almost always definitely if only slightly in advance (diegetically) of the events she recounts (the morning after the night before, as it were) and she is also looking back upon all the events as already concluded: the letters are presented to us by the long-married Pamela even though written by the once-persecuted Pamela, since it is only the eventually happy conclusion which allows us to read those letters at all; Pamela has pre-read them for publication herself, just as, indeed, Mr B. has, prior to our ever opening the book. The logic of the various temporalities at work in *Pamela* is, therefore, that the conclusion is indeed *foregone*; without it the letters would have no function and therefore no public existence. (It's perhaps surprising to realise how close Richardson can seem to Laurence Sterne in the light of this reading!)

Dr. Andrews insists upon this dimension because he sees an 'internal parallel' to it within the text: Pamela's constant appeals to 'Providence', he reminds us, bring into play the quite literal 'fore-knowledge' of the Divine Omniscience, yet that foreknowledge is also (in that peculiar temporal mode so typical of the Divine) simultaneously retrospective. For Pro-vidence, everything that is to happen has already happened; it is only God who is always 'up to the minute', perfectly on time. But to some extent at least Pamela the presenter (whose presence is of course a silent one) similarly is retrospectively fore-knowing about the fate of Pamela the writer. At this point Dr. Andrews back-tracks to his question about the reader: if Mr B. is 'converted' by reading Pamela's letters, should not the reader of the novel also be converted?

One might of course reply that the 'good' reader needs no conversion anyway—but Dr. Andrews slyly punctures that response by asking why a (morally) good reader should have continued reading this novel in the first place, a tale of seduction, near rape, and 'Scenes of Immodesty, painted in Images of Virtue' (Charles Povey's opinion in 1741). The moral reader might well 'blush at the manner in which he undresses our sex', but then turns the page quickly to see the next petticoat fall. So we all, as interested readers, are shadowed by the need for purification of our desires—but how is this effected?

The twist in the tale is neatly engineered by Richardson: *we* have *already* read Pamela's letters and journals by the (diegetical) time Mr B. reads them: we are already committed to the story, and if the subsequent trajectory of the tale is to remain credible we have to accept that reading these writings can indeed 'change' Mr B. — and therefore ought (we recognise, retrospectively) to have *already* changed us. To claim immunity is either to admit that we are more incorrigible than Mr B. (and therefore even more in need of conversion) or to reject the rest of the novel as based upon an unbelievable premise: that reading these letters *could* convert anyone, since they haven't converted us.

This pincer-trap could be formulated as: *either* be converted *or* stop believing this novel. (Once Mr B. has been converted, the unregenerate reader is likely to lose interest in the novel anyway, anticipating that the rest will be far less titillating!) But this trap is sprung not only by Richardson but also, it would seem, by God Himself. If part of what we are invited to find credible by the novel is that God foreknows all and that all events are held within the overarching control of God's Providence, then God already knows, 'outside' the novel, which readers will be suitably 'converted' by reading *Pamela*, and which won't. As Pamela herself says, in her struggle against the temptation to suicide (precisely that passage which will most affect Mr B. in his reading): 'God can touch the heart in an instant' — yet if that is true of Mr B. it is also presumably true of the reader:

conversion may be set before us (or set up for us) by Richardson's construction of the text but it will always be God's work if it actually occurs, even though, as so often in Richardson, we have to trust both to Providence and to our own best endeavours, at least as sympathetic readers.

This is a fairly attractive, if tortuous argument, and I think Dr. Andrews has genuinely uncovered one of the deeper structures of the architecture of *Pamela*. He has clarified one precise way in which the text might be claimed to have a palpable design upon us (one remembers Richardson's own claims).

Yet I fear that Dr. Andrews has orchestrated that device a little more coherently in his account than the text itself actually does. He has succumbed to the temptation of many critics today: to create a text that only really exists in his imagination, an ideal work while the real text is surely far less neatly logical in its operations. Dr. Andrews seems, in fact, to have overlooked part of his own analysis: that Mr B. actually reads Pamela's correspondence in three separate batches, and that the first — purloined — sequence of letters seems to have no effect upon him; only the second batch lend themselves to Dr. Andrews' argument. Moreover, it is to love of Pamela, not to love of God, that Mr B. is brought (though much later Lady D. will remark, it is true, 'My brother turned Puritan!'); and I have yet to meet a reader who fell in love with Pamela from reading *Pamela*. Which indicates an even larger hole in this elegantly hollow argument: there is no recognition in Dr. Andrews' analysis of the fact that readers are differently gendered — yet this surely needs to be integrated into his assertions about the differential responses of the good and bad reader.

Nevertheless, this interesting chapter at least prompted me to reconsider my own responses to *Pamela*. I must report, however, that I still consider Richardson to be adapting not a tactic of Christian conversion but a classically Aristotelian strategy: the fusion of *anagnorisis* (Recognition) with *peripeteia* (Reversal) at the same dramatic high-point (Mr B.'s reading is both a recognition of Pamela and a reversal of

her fortunes). To adapt this tragic formula to the epistolatory novel was achievement enough, to my mind.

I actually find the *excurses* to this chapter more interesting and suggestive than the main body of the text. The first assembles a great deal of material on — of all things — eighteenth-century card games, and quite persuasively argues for a parallel between the processes of playing Whist (the craze for which began in 1743, three years after the publication of *Pamela*) and the operations involved in following the moves in an epistolatory novel: each letter regarded as a card played, but with the opponent's full hand as yet unrevealed. (On this analogue Mr B. is a complete cad as well as a would-be rapist: he peers over his opponent's shoulder at her hand.) Not only does Dr. Andrews reinforce this suggestion by contemporary allusions to the parallel (he even, rather dubiously, instances the allegorical card game in *Pamela* itself), but he further connects the eighteenth-century mania for both novel-reading and card games to the underlying economic structure of eighteenth-century English society.

His link is the emergence of the Stock Exchange, in an as-yet not-fully-successful attempt to rationalise and to ritualise the random chances and risks of commercial speculation. For Dr. Andrews there is a common pattern underpinning these various activities, card games, gambling, South Sea Bubble speculation, and the emergence of novel-reading: an element of playing with risk and with anticipated *probabilities* within a 'system' of rules that is never fully predictable and never finally systematic. He then tries further to assimilate seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theological notions of Providence and of belief to this pattern: Pascal's famous wager on faith (a kind of two-way bet) offers him a happy peg on which to begin to build his case, while Adam Smith's sadly discredited economic 'guiding hand' provides him with an apposite end-term for his analysis; *en route* he even makes some sense of the significance of Soame Jenyns, and reminds us of the contribution of Pope's friend John Arbuthnot to the

development of probability theory. On this account, reading an eighteenth-century novel was almost a practical exercise in probability theory.

The second *excursus* takes a different tack. He interprets his own reading of *Pamela* as showing that Richardson is here foisting onto the reader a problem (that of believing or not believing in Providence) which is ostensibly only 'internal' to the text (Pamela's trust in Providence) yet which, as a problem for the author, crucially shapes the construction and manipulation of the text. He then suggests that this basic device of foisting one's own problems onto the reader comes to assume a central role in the later development of the novel, offering *Mary Barton* and *Daniel Deronda* as prime instances. (He might, I suppose, have made a more convincing case by beginning from Robinson Crusoe's problems with Providence — or even by linking back to Milton.)

In *Mary Barton*, he claims, Mrs. Gaskell negotiates her own problem — of how to intervene in liberal sympathy with the industrial classes — by writing a novel, the reading of which then leaves the reader with Mrs. Gaskell's original problem: what to do in terms of concretely intervening in the kind of industrial conflict to which the novel has alerted us. Unless the reader is to take Mrs. Gaskell's own solution and simply write yet another novel, the reader has been manipulated into trying to solve Mrs. Gaskell's original problem in her place. In other words, Mrs. Gaskell's strategy is to 'convert' her readers into making an active contribution she herself can avoid having to make, precisely by opting to convert others.

Dr. Andrews sees this as evincing the characteristic 'bad faith' of the concerned liberal and locates its eighteenth-century roots in the fundamental writing convention of *The Spectator,* the very title of which indicates its concerned but merely observational stance *vis-à-vis* all social problems. (He might, one can add, have included those sad figures one sees outside factory gates forlornly selling unwanted left-wing newspapers — but perhaps that would be to approach too

near his own problems?) George Eliot's case is even more desperately 'liberal': her *Daniel Deronda* rightly sees the utter vacuity of the English social system so magisterially depicted in the 'Gwendolen Harleth' sections of the novel, but s/he then 'exports' this critique into quasi-Zionist utopianism instead of turning that critique back upon English society itself. For Dr. Andrews, Deronda should presumably have become a Chartist or a Fraternal Democrat and the novel should, formally, have curved back upon its opening and critically demolished it rather than ending upon an open future elsewhere. George Eliot has, for Dr. Andrews, taken Mrs Gaskell's device of deflection a stage further: the reader is now encouraged towards a purely imaginary outcome, a displacement of any active response into a world that exists only in the novel itself.

This step is made even more visible in Tolstoy's early short story 'A Landlord's Morning' (1856) where the would-be reforming landlord returns from a morning's preliminary survey of what needs to be done on his estate and simply transposes his reactions into an *extempore* composition at the piano. For the relentless Dr. Andrews, Tolstoy's own story does exactly the same: Tolstoy sees what needs to be done but instead of doing it constructs a short story which encourages his readers to rest content with appreciating the irony of the story rather than actually reforming anything.

From that aesthetic 'internalisation' of authorial problems it is a short step to such tales as Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* in which the reader's 'choice' between different causal explanations for what is happening within the narrative remains purely interpretative, changing nothing and solving nothing, since the story is so constructed as to allow radically different readings to lead to the same ambiguous conclusion without even a comma of the text needing to be modified, let alone anything in the real world outside the novel.

The final phase in this underlying development of a novelistic strategy is located by Dr. Andrews in the matchstick game in Resnais and Robbe-Grillet's film *Last*

Year in Marienbad, which he reads as an 'internal model' of the reader's role: whatever 'decisions' or 'interpretations' the reader chooses (whichever matchstick the challenger begins from) makes no difference at all: the system is so rigged that the game always ends the same way — and always remains merely a game (one recalls card games). The hidden rule is, simply, that the novelist — like God's Providence — can choose in advance who will win; all the reader, by this stage in a long process, need be concerned with is the elegance and style of play; real problems have long since been aestheticised out of existence, turned into a pure language-game. On this account, both reading and writing novels are collusive exercises in Bad Faith.

The third *excursus* reminds us that both eighteenth-century card games and the Stock Exchange were concerned with 'making' (actually, redistributing) money and Dr. Andrews then counterposes Adam Smith's Providential economics to Karl Marx's analysis of capitalism in *Das Kapital* — only to find a variation of Richardson's tactic in *Das Kapital* itself. In a tantalisingly brief *excursus* he analyses Marx's use of the term 'pre-supposition' in the *Grundrisse* and in *Kapital,* pinpointing that term as the hinge around which the 'logical' and the 'historical' exposition of these texts turn. If we take 'presupposition' in a logical sense we have a formally coherent theory in which all factors mutually support each other: each becomes, in turn, a presupposition of the others. If we take the term in its temporal sense (*pre*-supposition) we have an historical account which rests upon a finally accidental process: without these presuppositions (pre-conditions) 'capitalism' could not have emerged yet capitalism cannot retro-spectively guarantee the emergence of its own 'pre-suppositions' any more than mere pre-suppositions can guarantee the development of an economic system which presupposes them.

Though formulated rather confusingly, Dr. Andrews' point seems to be that in reading Marx's argument in *Das Kapital* the reader is enticed into accepting its own logical structure (its expositional arrangement as a text in which

certain sections 'presuppose' pre-ceding ones) as exemplifying a logical structure in an historically existing economic 'system': we find as we read that we have to retrospectively reinterpret certain logical uses of the term 'presupposition' *as* historical-temporal uses of the term in order to make coherent sense of the overall argument.

Like most effective 'conversions', it seems, any conversion to marxism is curiously retrospective: it has *already* happened to us before we are prepared to acknowledge it — and the very structure of *Das Kapital* enacts this movement. On this account, reading Marx is like reading a very good novelist. However, while I accept that the role of these *excurses* is to sketch rather than to demonstrate a case, I suspect that Dr. Andrews in this final *excursus* has not adequately done his homework on Hegel's *Logic*. Still, neither have I, so while it is refreshing to see *Das Kapital* treated as sharing some of its organisational devices with a 'literary' text like *Pamela*, I must register an intrigued but basically sceptical response to Dr. Andrews' outline of his approach here.

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The next two chapters of the book can be dealt with more summarily. Chapter 3 focuses on chapter XIII of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* and analyses how Coleridge uses the device of the sudden 'letter from a friend' (which he inserts at this point instead of the promised theory of the 'imagination') in order, in effect, to create a 'blank space' at the centre of his work which the reader then has to fill for himself. By a series of promises, postponements, digressions and interludes Coleridge has, in the first part of *Biographia*, built up not only an expectation but almost a *need* for the 'theory' which Coleridge claims to be able to provide. Then, at the last moment, we are deprived of that very theory, at the apparent behest of a 'friend' who writes to Coleridge advising him to omit the chapter. This 'friend' was, as Coleridge once acknowledged in one of his own letters, Coleridge himself.

Clearly, for Dr. Andrews, *Biographia Literaria* is another instance of a text foisting onto its reader the author's own unsolved problem, but Coleridge's tactic is shown to be more complex and multi-layered than, say, Mrs Gaskell's — and also more praiseworthy, since inescapable. Dr. Andrews traces, through Coleridge's letters and notebooks, the emergence of *Biographia Literaria* as an intended 'Preface' to or even preliminary version of the long-projected *Logosophia*, the '*organum vere organum*', the always elusive *magnum opus* on the *omne scibile* ('everything understood' ?) which Coleridge so often planned and never actually wrote.

Central to the whole project was, increasingly, the notion of autobiography (itself a relatively new concept in the early nineteenth century: the term itself had emerged in the ambience of German Idealist philosophy only in the 1780s), since at the core of Coleridge's ontological and epistemological position was the insistence on identity as constituted by the self-reflexive consciousness of a 'continuousness' of consciousness, in which 'subject' and 'object' are 'co-adunated' in the great 'I AM' which is the primary affirmation of both the Divine and the human individual. Much of this basic strand in Coleridge's thinking is encapsulated in the ten 'Theses' to be found in *Biographia* chapter XII, but they are still offered there as pre-liminary to the promised treatment of the Imagination in chapter XIII; that treatment is then not given.

The effect, argues Dr. Andrews, is curious. As we read chapter XII, and indeed chapters IV to XI, we give *provisional assent* to Coleridge's outlined positions because we *anticipate* that they will soon be clarified and fully justified retrospectively once the theory of Imagination is completely formulated in chapter XIII. But when that theory is, in fact, withheld we then find ourselves endeavouring to construct it for ourselves *retrospectively* on the basis of those previously only provisionally accepted positions.

As an account of a reader's possible reaction, I find this very plausible and I also think that Dr Andrews is correct when he goes on to argue that Coleridge's very notion of

'Understanding' requires that this *must* be the kind of process the reader has to undergo. One can put it thus: to understand what the 'Imagination' is, the reader has to exercise his 'Imagination': a theory of Imagination cannot be simply 'given' to the reader, it has to be co-created (co-adunated ?) by an *act* of Imagination. Coleridge's footnote, in chapter XII, on the etymology of the word 'understanding' is relevant here:

> The force of the Greek *sunienai* is imperfectly expressed by 'understanding'; our own idiomatic phrase 'to go along with me' comes nearest to it.

In *Biographia Literaria* we are brought to 'go along with' Coleridge in his tracing of his own intellectual history (a history that, of course, involves much more than 'intellect'). As we imaginatively re-create for ourselves and 'enter into' (think of Coleridge on Shakespeare) that personal trajectory we too are brought to the position where we can 'understand' what the 'Imagination' is — though, precisely like Coleridge himself, we cannot fully formulate our understanding.

That same footnote continues with a deliberately 'corrected' quotation from the *Enneads* which Coleridge translates as:

> 'What then are we to understand?' That whatever is produced is an intuition, I silent.

Coleridge's own 'silence' in chapter XIII is intended to generate in us an 'intuition' — but an intuition that has to be worked for.

The 'friend's' letter itself directs us to another (characteristically long) footnote, in chapter IV, which both indicates the kind of effort required of us and also suggests

(in the example offered) the basic process of 'change' we have to undergo:

> In opinions of long continuance, and in which we had never before been molested by a single doubt, to be suddenly convinced of an error is almost like being convicted of a fault. There is a state of mind which is the direct antithesis of that, which takes place when we make a bull. The bull namely consists in bringing together two incompatible thoughts, with the sensation, but without the sense, of their connection. The psychological condition, or that which constitutes the possibility of this state, being such disproportionate vividness of two distant thoughts, as extinguishes or obscures the consciousness of the intermediate images or conceptions, or wholly abstracts the attention from them. Thus in the well-known bull, 'I was a fine child, but they changed me'; the first conception expressed in the word 'I', is that of personal identity — *Ego contemplans*: the second expressed in the word 'me', is the visual image or object by which the mind represents to itself its past condition, or rather, its personal identity under the form in which it imagined itself previously to have existed, — *Ego contemplatus*. Now the change of one visual image for another involves in itself no absurdity, and becomes absurd only by its immediate juxtaposition with the first thought, which is rendered possible by the whole attention being successively absorbed in each singly, so as not to notice the interjacent notion, 'changed', which by its incongruity with the first thought, 'I', constitutes the bull. Add only, that this process is facilitated by the circumstances of the words 'I' and 'me', being sometimes equivalent, and sometimes having a distinct meaning; sometimes, namely, signifying the act of self-consciousness, sometimes the external image in and by which the mind represents that act to itself, the result and symbol of its individuality. Now, suppose the direct contrary state, and you will have a

> distinct sense of the connection between two conceptions, without that sensation of such connection which is supplied by habit. The man feels as if he were standing on his head, though he cannot but see that he is truly standing on his feet. This, as a painful sensation, will of course have a tendency to associate itself with the person who occasions it; even as persons, who have been by painful means restored from derangement, are known to feel an involuntary dislike towards their physician.

As Coleridge formulates it later (chapter XII, Thesis X): 'intelligence is a self-development, not a quality supervening to a substance.' It is only by this 'self-development' that we are able to grasp that 'realizing intuition which exists by and in the act that affirms its existence' (chapter XII), that very act which allows us to 'go along with' the 'Imagination'.

Now, Dr. Andrews quite clearly regards this whole Coleridgean process as so much self-delusion rather than as self-comprehension, as merely another variation on the 'conversion double-binds' he has set out to trace, analyse and reject. For him, Coleridge's bland references back to chapter XIII in subsequent chapters of *Biographia Literaria* (e.g. 'My own conclusions on the nature of poetry, in the strictest use of the word, have been in part anticipated in the preceding disquisition on the fancy and imagination', chapter XIV) are merely sleight-of-mind: the reader is persuaded, even covertly flattered, into believing retrospectively that he has already achieved a genuine insight, whereas in fact only a blank space remains in the mind as we think back to what seemed, at the time, an elusive but almost enlightening moment.

In a sardonic survey of the immense secondary literature on Coleridge's 'theory', Dr. Andrews endeavours to demonstrate that Coleridge's tactic has been 'comically successful', as critic after critic has filled in the 'holes' in *Biographia* with 'word-spinning discriminations and revaluations', all of them the product of 'scholarly fancy'.

I find this exercise in malicious carping extremely distasteful, but there are clearly fundamental disagreements at issue here concerning the very nature of literary scholarship, which will have to await another occasion for debate.

The *excurses* to this chapter on Coleridge are fairly predictable. In the first we are taken on a whistle-stop tour of Hegel, Kierkegaard and Blake, the former two being castigated for similar tactical sleight-of-mind (the victimised texts are the 1820s' *Aesthetics Lectures* and Kierkegaard's *Repetition*), while Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* are lauded, by contrast, as an instance of a 'concrete dialectic' in which each set of songs (to adapt Coleridge's own phrasing in chapter XII, Thesis VI) 'pre-suppose each other, and can exist only as antitheses'. Blake's 'concrete dialectic' — a matter of provoking a reading experience which realises the need for, yet the actual destruction of, a transcendent criterion of judgement — is favourably compared with Marx's 'abstract' dialectic in *Das Kapital*, a matter merely of the tactics of expository writing.

In the second *excursus*, Dr. Andrews takes up some remarks by Coleridge on the effects of the 'theoretical' *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads* upon readers' 'practice' in evaluating the actual poems (chapter IV), and argues that Coleridge was finally willing to allow a divorce between 'theory' and 'practice' which his own practice partly repudiates. He once again analyses the overall structure of *Biographia Literaria,* this time to show that chapters I to XII are a 'preparation' for the 'theory' of chapter XIII, and that that 'theory' then undergirds the 'practice' of the criticism of Wordsworth in chapters XIV onwards; but by omitting the actual 'theory' Coleridge leaves only a spurious continuity in his text: chapters I to XII are not, for Dr Andrews, in fact a preparation for the practice of Volume II, despite Coleridge's inconsistent attempt to make them appear so.

Dr. Andrews then draws a parallel between this textual organisation of *Biographia* and what he sees as a characteristic flaw in the endeavours of 'romantic radical intellectuals': they spend long years 'preparing' an adequate 'theory'

(which they never finally produce) and then persuade themselves that such intellectual 'preparation' was really a preparation for practical politics. His particular targets here are periodicals, from Coleridge's own *The Friend* (which sought to 'aid in the formation of fixed principles in politics, morals and religion') to such extreme twentieth-century examples as *Theoretical Practice* (an English Althusserian journal of the early 1970s), and he characterises their implicit 'strategy' as fundamentally one of 'the Kierkegaardian *leap* applied to revolution'.

Surprisingly perhaps, he then seeks to salvage his own (Coleridgean?) version of 'Imagination in polities' by citing Coleridge on Kant (chapter IX): 'An idea, in the highest sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a symbol; and, except in geometry, all symbols of necessity involve an apparent contradiction.' For the apparently inconsistent Dr. Andrews, then, 'revolution' is precisely such an 'idea' and therefore, *a fortiori*, all 'theories' of 'revolution' must themselves contain 'apparent contradictions'. One can only murmur in response that 'All Power to the Imagination' was therefore presumably a bankrupt slogan even in the moment of its coinage.

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The final, and in some ways most attractive, chapter of *Literary Conversions* begins from the end of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.
> Through the unknown, remembered gate
> When the last of earth left to discover
> Is that which was the beginning;

At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always —
(A condition of complete simplicity
Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

In an impressive and engaging commentary on this passage Dr. Andrews delicately evokes the multitude of echoes and resonances that hover round each line, each phrase, in this close. It is an attractive display of perceptive critical powers one had not suspected him capable of (though the close reading of Herbert's 'Prayer' manifested similar virtues at times). Reading his vivid commentary we are brought to recall literally hundreds of previous passages and phrases within *Four Quartets* itself and in the wealth of literary texts to which those passages themselves allude.

I shall not attempt to summarise this reading: it convincingly demonstrates that the passage acts as an intensely charged summing-up of all that has gone before in these uniquely evocative poems. By the end of Dr. Andrews' many, many pages of analysis scarcely a line in the whole of *Four Quartets* has not been brought into play. (I suspect that his copyright fees to Faber & Faber must have been considerable.)

But then Dr. Andrews turns the tables upon his reader. He invites us, at the end of his analysis, to re-read the whole quoted passage again, 'bearing in mind' his entire analysis. His experiment succeeded in the case of this reader at least: I found myself quite simply defeated by the demand. I managed to read as far as

> Not known, because not looked for
>
> But heard, half-heard, in the stillness

before I gave up, acknowledging that my memory, my ears, could no longer hold onto all the associations at once: either I would have to slow down my reading to an infinitesimally meditative pace or I would have to read on in a radically selective way, no longer 'looking for' but only, at best, 'half-hearing' the words, quotations, phrases, allusions, that should have been 'echoing, thus, in my mind' while the music lasted.

I then returned to Dr Andrews' merciless argument: he now invited me to *re-read* the *whole* of *Four Quartets* with a similar degree of intense attention, to return (as the closing passage implicitly invites us to) to

> ..where we started
>
> And know the place for the first time.

I dutifully began at

> Time present and time past

but knew the task to be hopeless from the start. By the time (and what 'time' is that?) I would have arrived at

> And the fire and the rose are one

I knew that my mind would long since have faltered, allowed its attention to lapse from the full and total engagement demanded.

In a sense, I had always, in practice, known this to be true of my reading of *Four Quartets*. After many re-readings, I have become acutely aware of my own incapacity to 'hold' this poem. I take it, in practice, in short passages. Dr. Andrews was now inviting me to reflect upon that process, to realise that the essential strategy of the poem is precisely this: to exhaust the critical responses of the reader by a kind of excessive, impossible over-loading of those very responses. The effect is to make the poem, 'as a poem', as a single consecutive reading experience, literally un-judgeable. No reader could claim to have adequately read this poem, from its beginning to its end, and therefore no reader could claim to be in a position to 'judge' it. To 'analyse' it, as we all can, in short passages, or even *in toto*, is *not* the same as to 'read' it, and the more we analyse it the more literally un-readable we have to recognise it to be.

How then, asks Dr Andrews, are we to arrive at an assessment of the religious claims the poem advances? He cites the passage which many take to be the doctrinal 'centre' of the poem:

> For most of us, there is only the unattended
> Moment, the moment in and out of time,
> The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
> The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
> Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
> While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
> Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
> Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.

> The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

But, he asks, if our actual reading of *Four Quartets* shows us that even in the experience of 'being' 'the music while the music lasts', the poem while the reading lasts, we are mainly, much of the time, in a distraction 'fit', if all our best efforts at 'full and complete possession of the poem' (in Dr Leavis's famous phrase) amount to little more than an 'unattended moment', an intermittence of our total attention, and if these experiences are — as indeed the passage itself asserts — at best 'only hints and guesses', how can we possibly even 'half understand' the line:

> The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

We are caught in a trap of our own making, our own reading. (Though George Herbert, we recall, perhaps first 'set' it.)

Can we simply dismiss this line, this claim—in which case must we be claiming to have adequately understood it, which would involve (at least) a total, a full comprehension and possession of the whole poem? Or do we continue to suspend our judgement until we have completed our reading of the whole poem—only to find that we cannot complete that reading without, many times, wavering in our full attention to the poem, a wavering which must, in honesty, lead us to 'try again' before delivering our final judgement? Our only option seems to be to join the ranks of those

> Who are only undefeated
>
> Because we have gone on trying.

But that must leave us in a 'suspension of disbelief' more radical than anything even Coleridge (chapter XIV) or, in a different context, Milton, envisaged.

The crux of the problem, as Dr. Andrews clearly sees, is the poetic 'authority' of *Four Quartets*, indeed of T.S. Eliot, in our time. Once we accept that *Four Quartets* is or even may be a major literary achievement we must be brought, inescapably, to a personal negotiation of its demands upon us as a reader (not just as a more or less detached 'teacher', analytical 'critic' or learned commentator), but as *readers* of the poem we are defeated by it: we can never fully read it. We are thereby left, if not quite in a state of 'conversion' to its implicit and explicit doctrinal demands, at least in a dilemma of agnosticism concerning its religious 'hints and guesses'; such suspended assent is a characteristic twentieth-century stance in religious matters and it is perhaps only a shade away from (provisional) acquiescence.

Dr. Andrews, since he views this very possibility with alarm and ideological horror, is therefore determined to demolish the 'authority' of *Four Quartets*. To do so, he seems to think it sufficient to demonstrate the 'trick' (his cheap word) it works upon us. He analyses Eliot's whole *oeuvre* as a gradual refinement and perfecting of this 'trick', from *The Waste Land*'s self-cancelling 'message' or double-bind (concisely: if this poem is successful it shows us that the unity of European culture has been so shattered as to make it impossible for this to be a successful poem) to the moment at the end of *Murder in the Cathedral* when the audience is impaled on a hermeneutical hook: *either* you interpret Becket's actions in a secular mode, in which case you must reject the *Te Deum* that follows the Knights' secular explanations, *or* you accept the *Te Deum* purely as an 'aesthetic' closure, in which case you must shrug off the direct challenge of the Knights' addresses — *or* you must 'believe', deliberately *joining in* the singing of *Te Deum* as an affirmation.

Dr. Andrews thus sees Eliot as trying throughout his career to fix his readers in such double-binds (none of which quite work) until in *Four Quartets* he came so close to it that he could regard himself as having succeeded. After that, the essential impetus of his poetic writing was exhausted.

I doubt if this will do as a guiding thread for interpreting Eliot's career, and I fail to see why Dr Andrews should regard his analysis as diminishing Eliot's authority and achievement: all great writers are great precisely because they exploit the 'tricks' of the language to the utmost. But at least I will concede to Dr Andrews that, in the light of this chapter, I am more prepared to tolerate his earlier rejection of 'liberal' literary criticism: Eliot's work does indeed, for our age, demand of us a response that can shape our lives, not merely a scholarly dissertation. Personally, I am very aware of a pressure upon me, at the end of a good performance of *Murder in the Cathedral*, to join in the singing of the *Te Deum*; though it may slightly reassure Dr Andrews to know that I cannot finally do so — I happen to have no ear for music.

The final two *excurses* in the book are very different in character from each other. The first is a comparison of two once-fashionable texts, Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: an inquiry into values* (1974) and Douglas R. Hofstadter's *Godel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid* (1979), in each of which Dr Andrews sees an attempt to take the reader 'beyond logic'. But the first he sees as operating by a deceitful sleight-of-text, in which basic logical errors masquerade as introducing us to a new mode of thought. He locates the crucial mistaken move in a passage towards the end of chapter 19 of *Zen*:

> I don't know how much thought passed before he arrived at this, but eventually he saw that Quality couldn't be independently related with either the subject or the object but could be found only in the relationship of the two with each other. It is the point at which subject and object meet.
>
> That sounded warm.
>
> Quality is not a thing. It is an event.
>
> Warmer.

> It is the event at which the subject becomes aware of the object.
>
> And because without objects there can be no subject — because the objects create the subject's awareness of himself — Quality is the event at which awareness of both subjects and objects is made possible.
>
> Hot.
>
> Now he knew it was coming.
>
> This means Quality is not just the result of a collision between subject and object. The very existence of subject and object themselves is deduced from the Quality event. The Quality event is the cause of the subjects and objects, which are then mistakenly presumed to be the cause of the Quality!
>
> Now he had that whole damned evil dilemma by the throat. . . And at that point, . . he knew he had reached some kind of culmination of thought he had been unconsciously striving for over a long period of time.

This passage constitutes both the climactic moment of insight for 'Phaedrus' and the point of 'conversion' for the reader—but it is as spurious and self-deluding, for Dr. Andrews, as all the other 'conversion double-binds' he has traced. In fact, it is even worse, since the logical error here is that of a first-year student: that x is logically deducible from y in no way implies that x is the ontological cause of y; Pirsig has merely provided yet another variation on the elusively attractive 'ontological proof' of St Anselm.

Nevertheless, Dr. Andrews concedes that *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* is brilliantly constructed as a literary double-bind upon the reader: it combines Coleridge's device of a 'blank space' with Samuel Richardson's tactic of a 'retrospective' enforcement of the central premise of the credibility of the text (both are achieved in effect through the loss of memory of the schizophrenic autobiographical protagonist), but the whole work leads us towards what is,

for Dr. Andrews, the dangerously irrational post-metaphysical philosophy of Martin Heidegger — Pirsig's re-discovery of the pre-Socratics is merely Americanised Heidegger.

Doug Hofstadter's book, on the other hand, Dr. Andrews sees as exposing its own double-bind tactics in its explanation of, as well as its utilisation of, Godel's 'Theorem'. *Godel, Escher, Bach* instructs us in the limitations of logic, in the ultimate self-contradictions of any fully rigorous theory, while also exemplifying our capacity to construct a coherence of a different order. In an unsual gesture of praise, Dr. Andrews maintains that it is Hofstadter rather than Eliot who has outlined the intellectual music of our time, and that music is to be heard in the complex codes that govern both our intelligences and our genes, in the basic languages of computers and in the symmetrical patterns of the DNA double-helix. Provided we pursue our real possibilities of self-understanding today, in the light of these disparate scientific advances (which, as scientific, are always only provisional), we can indeed hope to arrive at that 'Theory of Life' which so eluded Coleridge — and it will be a fully materialist, not an idealist, understanding. Clearly, Dr. Andrews prefers the latter — though it seems to me not only that he is perhaps here guilty of an elementary logical error of his own but also that one implication of this particular *excursus* seems to be that the textual devices he has been so remorselessly criticising might also have, even in his own terms, positive as well as dubious applications.

The last *excursus* of all returns to the theme of authority, but, unlike the rest of the book, it is a quite passionately polemical piece of directly political writing. Dr Andrews counterposes the patient pedagogical lucidity of Hofstadter's expositions of such apparently abstruse topics as computer processes and microbiological experiments with the constant recourse of politicians to a contemptuous manipulation of 'public opinion'. By orchestrating a witheringly sarcastic, Karl Kraus-like series of quotations, he surveys the 'public

relations' output of government departments and parliamentary spokesmen from all the major political parties in England, and demonstrates how — on a range of issues from nuclear power to defence strategy, from public expenditure to phone-tapping, from Foreign Office diplomacy to transport policy— the 'official' version of events at the time has been deliberately at variance with what was then known to the propagators of those versions but only subsequently and with immense difficulty (if at all) discovered to be the case by concerned citizens. The paradox he pinpoints at the end of this angry marshalling of newspaper reports, Hansard speeches and politicians' memoirs, is that the basic 'authority' to which appeal is now made, is that of 'democracy', yet it is in the name of 'democracy' that we are denied access to a full knowledge of the political decisions taken in our name.

The basic device by which this effective disenfranchisement is achieved is an insistence, by the 'professional' politicians and their hand-picked experts, that the issues are too 'complex', too sophisticated, too 'technical' for 'us' to 'understand' — and, faced with what seems an enormous over-load of data, the individual citizen is only too inclined to agree. Even if we make the effort to understand, say, the intricacies of defence expenditure, we soon find ourselves entangled in an over-whelming barrage of 'technical' considerations. At this point, the temptation is to accept our 'ignorance', our 'incapacity', and to acquiesce in whatever decisions 'they' take for us.

This, concludes the angry Dr. Andrews, is the contemporary form of *religious* belief: a trust in a 'Providence' every bit as enigmatic and opaque (and perhaps ultimately as destructive) as that in which Pamela believed, and an agnosticism which is, in practice, simply a 'willing suspension' of our critical responses. But, he argues, there is another process also at work: the perennial mistrust in which politicians are held is now intensifying, he thinks, into a latent *paranoia*, on both sides. As the secrecy and impenetrability of 'official' decision-making deepens, so a

latent aggression towards this 'ideal-ego' of the political subject is growing; as the credibility of successive government administrations is retrospectively demolished in a rapidly accelerating process of *post-mortem* de-mystification (not least by politicians themselves), so the 'authority' of each current government is increasingly eroded, and soon all forms of official statement will be instantly re-interpreted — and even offered — as mere moves in a professional game of political cards. (Already we are being told *in advance* by media commentators how Ministers are *expected* to manipulate future media coverage of this or that coming issue.)

Dr. Andrews clearly sees ahead of us a period of 'political paranoia' (signalled from one side in recent increases in surveillance technology) but since he has already rejected the possibility of a 'rational, critical community' (see the *excursus* to Chapter 1), he can only hold out to us the prospect of a social and political crisis of 'authority' as deep as that in the seventeenth century from which his book began.

On this note his book ends, abruptly. His only concession to a lighter shade of black is a concluding quotation from *Four Quartets*. It sits rather oddly as a final, isolated, line in his text and defies any further commentary from me:

> The end is where we start from.

Postscript

Re-reading this review at proof stage I notice, wryly, a certain inconsistency between my initially declared intentions and my actual performance.

On first reading the book, I was inclined to treat at length chapters 1 and 2, while the other chapters and all the *excurses* seemed of slighter substance. The actual writing of the review has, apparently, persuaded me otherwise.

In retrospect, I realise that chapters 1 and 2 have received relatively short shrift, and that, in fact, the later chapters illuminate the earlier while the chapters themselves — tracing a 'logical' development of the 'conversion tactic' in literary texts — now seem mere excuses for the far more intriguing excurses analysing different kinds of 'authority'.

Perhaps, after all, Dr Andrews has succeeded in converting me — if not quite as he intended. So the final, retrospective advice of this postscript (too late, of course) is to read my review as well as the book itself in reverse order — starting from the end in order to arrive at 'something understood'.

Lawrence Fielding

VOICES READING GEORGE HERBERT: 'THE DEDICATION' *

This letter is written in a disguised voice!

Neddy Seagoon

'For I ain't, you must know,' said Betty, 'much of a hand at reading writing-hand, though I can read my Bible and most print. And I do love a newspaper. You mightn't think it, but Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices.'

Charles Dickens

HE DO THE POLICE IN DIFFERENT VOICES:

T. S. Eliot

Almost any part of a double bind sequence may then be sufficient to precipitate panic or rage. The pattern of conflicting injunctions may even be taken over by hallucinatory voices. . . if an individual doesn't know what sort of a message a message is, he may defend himself in ways which have been described as paranoid, hebephrenic or catatonic. . . He cannot, without considerable help, discuss the messages of others. Without being able to do that, the human bang is like any self-correcting system which has lost its governor; it spirals into never-ending, but always systematic, distortions.

Gregory Bateson

I was disguised as myself

Neddy Seagoon

The Dedication

Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee;
Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came,
And must return. Accept of them and me,
And make us strive, who shall sing best thy name.
Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain:
Theirs who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain.

George Herbert

*

Chris's Dialogue:

Q: That second line you just read out: 'Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came.' What do you mean by it?

A: Well, the dedication's addressed to God, and the line says that *The Temple* comes from God.

Q: You mean that God inspired it in some way?

A: Yes. Herbert's adapting the literary convention of the Muse inspiring the poet, and says that God's inspired him.

Q: You mean it's a convention; he doesn't really mean it?

A: Oh, yes, he means it. *The Temple* is inspired by God.

Q: Do you think that's true: that *The Temple is* inspired by God?

A: Yes.

Q: Why?

A: God tells me it is.

Q: ? ? ? Where, when, how?

A: There: in the text. It says: 'for from thee they came.'

Q: But that's what the text says, not God.

A: But God inspired the text, so it's God who says so.

Q: But that's nonsense! It's Herbert who says so.

A: Well, he should know, shouldn't he.

Q: How do you make that out?

A: Well, he tells us he was inspired by God, so...

Q: You're going round in circles! Herbert may be lying!

A: He wouldn't lie to God, would he, and the dedication's addressed to God, isn't it?

Q: Yes, but that's only a convention as well. It's really addressed to us.

A: No it isn't—it's addressed to God, and in any case Herbert wouldn't lie to us either about a thing like that.

Q: How do you know he wouldn't? He might think it was a 'white' lie that God would condone!

A: That would be an odd risk to take with God when you're dedicating your work to him. He's not lying. He's perfectly sincere.

Q: A sincere man can be mistaken. OK, he's not lying, but how do you know he's telling the truth?

A: Because the text tells me, and it's inspired by God.

Q: Come off it! If someone tells you he's inspired by God, do you believe him?

A: If it's true, I do.

Q: But how do you know it's true in this case?

A: Because Herbert tells me it is and he isn't lying.

Q: OK, but how does Herbert *know?*

A: You *know* when you're inspired by God!

Q: How do *you* know *that's* true? Have *you* been inspired by God?

A: Yes—I've read *The Temple* so I've been, in a way, inspired by reading it.

Q: That's just playing with words, as well as going round in circles! How would *Herbert know he was* inspired?

A: Well, God wouldn't deceive him, would He?

Q: But you're *presuming* that God's inspired him—we only have his word for it.

A: No we don't: we have God's word—in the text.

Q: No we don't! In any case, 'The Dedication' isn't part of *The Temple* so even if *The Temple's* inspired, this bit isn't, so...

A: Yes it is part of *The Temple*. You just don't believe that texts *can* be inspired by God.

Q: Even if I did believe that they could, why should I believe that *this* text was inspired by God?

A: Because I'm telling you it was.

Q: But who are you?! !

A: I'm the author.

Q: You're not Herbert!

A: Well, I just said: 'Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee,' so I must be the author.

Q: Nonsense! You were just reading it out.

A: —to you.

Q: So what does that make me?

A: God.

Q: But I'm not God!

A: Then why did you listen?

Q: Because you read it out.

A: Do you think I shouldn't have read it?

Q: No. It's addressed to God.

A: Then why did Herbert print it? If it's printed, the reader will read it.

Q & A (*The Reader*): Perhaps we shouldn't have read it?

Questioner: *I* was just listening.

Apologist: No you weren't. You were quoting it.

Quoter: *You* were quoting it.

Answer: *I* was *reading* it.

Q&A (together): Perhaps we shouldn't have read it?

Herbert: I told you whether you should read or shouldn't:

> Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain:
> Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain.

Reader: And which am I?

Herbert: I don't know.

Reader: Who does?

Herbert: You—and God.

Reader: *I* don't know.

Herbert: Then ask God.

Reader: ?

Herbert: It's all right. He'll tell you.

Reader: How?

Herbert: In *The Temple*.

Come, enter in.

Me thoughts I heard one calling, *Child.*

You (sotto voce): But does God exist?

Me (puzzled): Would that make any difference?

*

CHRIS: We can schematically suggest a number of practices and relationships that might be regarded as characteristic of what is normally meant by 'religion' when the word refers to the Western Christian tradition: relationships between God and a believer, involving some form of 'revelation' from God to the believer and some form of 'prayer' from the believer to God; relationships between two believers, particularly those between a 'minister' of some kind and a 'lay' believer within a 'church', involving perhaps some form of 'preaching' from minister to layperson and in some cases a form of 'confessing' from layperson to minister; relationships between a believer and a non-believer, which may take the form of attempts by a believer to 'convert' a non-believer and, in some sense, one might speak of an 'internal' relationship 'within' a 'believer' between believing and not believing.

Obviously, both this schema and, particularly, the terms I've used could be modified or elaborated. But this rough outline at least gives me a starting-point for considering some aspects of one connection between 'religion' and 'literature'.

That certain kinds of writing have a role or function within these relationships and practices is clear. One could instance the Bible itself or some other texts which are taken to be communications to the believer authorised by God,

and such forms of 'revelation' can be discussed in terms of inspiration, prophecy or infallibility.

In terms of 'prayer' one might instance not only, say, the 'Psalms' or the 'Our Father' from the Bible but also texts associated with liturgies; one might also include here a range of 'manuals' of private devotions, whether collections of actual prayers or 'exemplary works' such as Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* or Law's *Devout Life*. These latter might be regarded more as 'preaching' texts, along with volumes of sermons and works of spiritual guidance; and one might include here a wide range of theological works of a more 'instructional' kind. Some works of theology or commentary may also be placed alongside texts associated more with the practice of 'conversion', such as apologetical works, tracts or even polemics. And there are obviously various ways in which 'confessional' works might be considered—spiritual autobiographies or accounts of personal conversion.

But if we ask whether such writings should be regarded as what we now call 'literature', we might find it difficult to make clear decisions in a number of cases—though we might find it easier to say that the 'Book of Job' and 'The Song of Songs' are 'literature' than to say that the 'laws' section of 'Deuteronomy' or the 'Letter to the Hebrews' are 'literature'.

Similarly, though we might fairly readily think of Donne's *Sermons*, John of the Cross's *Songs* and *Romances*, Augustine's *Confessions* or Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in terms of 'literature', there are many other sermons, hymns and spiritual autobiographies that we wouldn't naturally think of as 'literature'—or we might, faced with some such texts, resort to a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' literature or even good and bad 'writing'. So, how do we regard George Herbert's *The Temple*? After all, it's been variously described as 'a manual of devotion', 'the seventeenth-century *Christian Year*' and 'a record of spiritual struggle', but also, obviously, as 'a collection of poems'.

Now, if I open *The Temple* at page 1 of my edition, I find a page—immediately before 'The Dedication'—headed 'The Printers to the Reader'. I want to pause over this page, because it seems to me to raise some of the problems of reading anything. This note from 'The Printers' opens:

> The dedication of this work having been made by the Author to the Divine Majestic onely, how should we now presume to interest any mortall man in the patronage of it? Much lesse think we it meet to seek the recommendation of the Muses, for that which himself was confident to have been inspired by a diviner breath then flows from Helicon. The world therefore shall receive it in that naked simplicitie, with which he left it, without any addition either of support or ornament, more then is included in it self. We leave it free and unforestalled to every mans judgement, and to the benefit that he shall finde by perusall. Onely for the clearing of some passages, we have thought it not unfit to make the common Reader privie to some few particularities of the condition and disposition of the Person. . .

This is a fairly unusual kind of note, as it makes clear itself. But it is also a very familiar kind of writing in one respect. It's written in the first person plural (We) but addressed to 'the reader' not to 'you', and the text speaks of 'every man', 'he' and 'the common Reader'—i.e. the reader it addresses is put grammatically into the third person, not the second person.

However, when we notice it and stop to think about it, this is itself a slightly odd practice. Compare it, for example, with the use of the second person when an announcer speaks on the radio to the listeners. But as a familiar writing practice, it is one that we transpose automatically; we read it as 'they' speaking to 'us': the written 'we' marks a position from which something is said, and the reader 'occupies' that

position while adopting simultaneously the 'position' designated by 'he'. The reader in fact performs a complex operation of double-positioning and in a sense speaks to himself while listening to himself—though he 'speaks' in a 'voice' shaped by the rhythms, pace and tone of what is written.

If we now look at the first stanza of 'The Church-Porch', which follows immediately after 'The Dedication', we find:

> THOU, whose sweet youth and early hopes inhance
> Thy rate and price, and mark thee for a treasure;
> Hearken unto a Verser, who may chance
> Ryme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure.
> A verse may finde him, who a sermon flies,
> And turn delight into a sacrifice.

The last two lines are a statement, but we tend to read that 'him' as almost implying a 'you'—i.e. as involving the reader of the poem in the possibility of 'a verse' finding him,—and, indeed, 'a verse' implies the 'verse' which the reader is reading. One reason, of course, for this way of reading the last two lines is the effect of the opening four lines of the stanza, which are addressed to 'thou'.

Reading these four lines is, again, a matter of complex positioning: the reader 'speaks' the lines but at the same time occupies the position of addressee, but an addressee who is stipulated as enjoying 'sweet youth' and 'early hopes' -— which the actual reader, of course, may not. But when we read that initial (capitalised) 'THOU' there is a momentary suspension: is this in some sense addressed to me, the actual reader or not? And if we consider the effect of that emphatically-placed 'Hearken unto a Verser' we are tempted to say that the 'Verser' is George Herbert speaking in his own voice to me, the actual reader.

But the use of 'a Verser' instead of, say, 'me', reminds us that the author of a poem may often adopt some kind of 'persona', a verbal 'mask' through which the poet speaks. By analogy, then, we might suggest that the effect of 'THOU, whose sweet youth and early hopes inhance' is to impose an 'im-persona' on the reader, so that as he 'listens' he occupies the position of the addressed 'thou' which is being addressed by the poet's 'persona' which, in reading, the reader also, in a sense, impersonates.

What, though, would we say of the last two lines in that case? These lines have an almost epigrammatic form; they present a statement about 'a verse' and 'him'; they aren't an address from 'a Verser' to 'thou'—yet we might read them as still part of the preceding 'address' (the change in line-indentation, rhyme, etc., leaves this an open possibility). Then 'him' would be doubly specified: the impersona is given another characteristic: not only a 'youth' but one 'who a sermon flies'. That we may read these lines as simply postulating some 'other' character (any 'him' who flies sermons) is, of course, part of the point of the ambiguity: it poses a self-question to the reader—am I such a character?

To what extent can we say that the 'statement' in these last two lines is different from the statements in the Printers' note which follows the passage previously quoted:

> Being nobly born, and as eminently endued with gifts of the minde, and having by Industrie and happy education perfected them to that great height of excellencie, whereof his fellowship of Trinitie Colledge in Cambridge, and his Orator-ship in the Universitie, together with that knowledge which the Kings Court had taken of him, could make relation farre above ordinarie.

Obviously, these statements can't be regarded as implying an 'impersona' for the reader, in terms of the information they contain, but it's worth noting that this is not, as it's quoted, a

complete grammatical sentence; it has to be read (though still ungrammatically) as a continuation of

> Onely for the clearing of some passages, we have thought it not unfit to make the common Reader privie to some few particularities of the condition and disposition of the Person;
>
> Being nobly born....

The paragraph-break here again indicates an option in reading: the previous paragraph has been an 'address' to the (third person) 'reader', 'every man', 'he'. The 'reader' postulated is anyone who reads the book. But the first paragraph ends with a kind of stipulation—the 'common Reader' who is presumed not to be already 'privie' to the details of Herbert's life which the note then goes on to specify. If the reader already is so 'privie', he may go on reading the rest of the note, but only by, in some sense, and however minimally or perhaps subliminally, 'adopting' the implied impersona of one who isn't so 'privie'. The rest of the note speaks in an informative voice: it presents the history of Herbert's life and offers opinions. To some extent, we could say that the first paragraph speaks in the Printers' own voice, but the second paragraph speaks in a less specific voice: that of the biographer or informer. That voice might be compared to the one we would 'hear' if we read 'A verse may finde him, who a sermon flies' as simply giving us a statement of 'fact' or 'opinion' without being specifically addressed to us as 'him'.

If we bear in mind these obvious and basic points about the Printers' note and the stanza so far commented on, we can suggest a further set of comparisons when we look, now, at 'The Dedication' and consider the 'voice' or 'voices' in which we might read it.

We could say, first, that the voice of the text seems to be very specific indeed: it is the voice of the author himself, the one who wrote *The Temple* ('my first fruits'). And, as it is a 'dedication', the addressee, the dedicatee, is clearly specified: it is God himself. But can we even attempt to 'imagine' God reading it—what 'voice' would He (She? It?) 'read' in? If we regard 'Lord' as a stipulation of an 'impersona' the reader is to adopt, how can anyone except God 'impersonate' that impersona?

Of course, if we compare this dedication with a more familiar one—say, 'To my Wife'—it's clear that in reading 'To my Wife' we don't even try to impersonate the wife reading it: she is a specific, actual person and she is not me. Nor can I impersonate the speaker whose wife she is: I am certainly not that specific person either. Such a dedication, one might claim, is neither addressed to me nor from me—unless I wrote the book I'm reading.

But what happens if we do read a dedication from someone else to someone else ? Does it give us information or make a statement, like the 'verse . . sermon' epigram, or like the biographical details in the Printers' note ? In one sense, it does (it 'tells' us that the writer is or was married), but we might compare it rather with overhearing information not intended for us, as in eavesdropping on a private exchange. Is this, then, how we should 'read' 'The Dedication' addressed by Herbert to God? (In which case, as often happens in eavesdropping, we find ourselves the subject, in part, of the conversation: 'Turn their eyes hither'). But how does this notion of 'eavesdropping' square with our actual reading of 'The Dedication'—can one eavesdrop on what one is, in some sense, saying to oneself anyway?

Consider certain different kinds of text. If I pick up a private letter not written to me—I find it between the pages of a book, for example—and read it, I know that I am neither the writer nor the specified recipient. I am therefore in the position of an 'eavesdropper'. But what 'voice' do I read it in? Insofar as I know the writer, I might find myself 'mimicking' his or her voice, and insofar as I know the

intended recipient I might try to 'imagine' how they might read it. But I am, biologically, historically, 'actually', neither the writer nor the intended recipient. I am in a curious position. Insofar as I 'listen' while I 'read', paying attention to what I read, I am rather like someone listening to someone else 'passing on' what they have overheard while eavesdropping, and that someone else might be regarded as 'rehearsing' what they overheard. But also, insofar as I try to occupy or intrude upon the positions of writer and recipient, I am having to attribute certain characteristics to both, to define them as possessing certain attributes proper to them. But if I don't know the actual people concerned, I have to more or less recover those attributes from my reading or interpretation of the letter—and even if I know one or both, I can hardly claim to know 'everything' about them (if only because I haven't read this letter before). I therefore have to select certain characteristics I take to be proper to them.

In doing so, I am 'dramatising' them, interpreting them as I might 'interpret' a role in a play-script. One might then speak of my trying to 'speak' in the writer's 'own voice' as my rehearsing, but I am not only rehearsing as speaker, but also 'as' 'listener'—I am doubly-positioned at least. And though I am being 'guided' by the text in attributing certain characteristics to both speaker and listener, I might be regarded as (with the help of the text) myself 'stipulating' a certain 'persona' for them both: in terms of what I 'know about people', I impersonate them both as certain kinds of people. I might then regard myself as occupying the same position as someone reading a text which both stipulates its own addressee as 'a certain kind of person'—an impersona—and itself speaks in a certain 'dramatic voice'—a persona. Of course I have to make my own decisions as to what that persona and that impersona are, but I would have to do that anyway in reading a text which did designate an impersona and persona.

If we now look back at the Printers' note to the reader, we can see that we read the first paragraph from our 'actual' position as 'listener'—i.e. the only attribute presumed in its

addressee by the text is that of actually reading it. Insofar as we are doing so, we fit the specification! In 'listening' therefore while we read, we listen 'as ourselves', whoever specifically we may be. But insofar as in reading it we read in a certain 'voice', we have to rehearse a certain persona, that of the Printers. But of course we can't now know them, so the persona we attribute to them can only be a matter of more or less specific information, 'historical imagination', and the guidance of the text itself.

But what happens when we read:

> Onely for the clearing of some passages, we have thought it not unfit to make the common Reader privie to some few particularities of the condition and disposition of the Person;

—do we go on reading? The impersona designated is that of someone (a common Reader) not already 'privie'. Do I, this specific reader, meet that stipulation? If I do, then I decide that I will go on reading 'as' myself; if I don't, then I can only go on reading if I somehow adopt the impersona of a 'common Reader'. But there are a number of problems here.

First, what is meant by 'common'—whoever is not already 'privie' to 'some few particularities' we are to be told? But we don't yet know what those 'few particularities' are to be; I might already know them or I might not, but I don't know that I know them until I know what they are; so I have to go on reading to find out. I might, of course, believe that I know them already—but only on the basis of the persona I have attributed to the Printers. In this respect, part of that persona is a stipulation of how much I believe they know about Herbert as compared with what I know, or think I know. Only if I believe that I know 'everything' about Herbert can I be sure that I know already whatever the printers are going to say. But how could I believe that I know 'everything' about Herbert—unless I was Herbert—or, perhaps, even unless I was 'God'. I might, of course,

want to know 'how much' the printers know—but since they only promise 'some few particularities', that may not be as much as they know anyway. Second, there is not just a problem about deciding what the printers might mean by 'common' and 'some few particularities'; I have to decide what I mean by them in this context.

We can use a different example here (though the same point might be made in terms of the printers' note, it would simply take longer). When I read:

> THOU, whose sweet youth and early hopes inhance
>
> Thy rate and price, and mark thee for a treasure

how do I decide whether I meet this stipulation or not? I, momentarily at least, can take that 'Thou' as addressed simply to the reader, any reader, but then the 'Thou' seems to be specified. If I take all three stipulations in these lines together, I might be able to say pretty decisively whether I still have 'sweet youth' or not and whether I am marked 'for a treasure' or otherwise, but what of 'early hopes': did I or didn't I, do I or don't I?

The problem that looms here could be phrased as: 'Can I class myself?' Insofar as a stipulated impersona is constituted as a set of characteristics, one might say that it defines or indicates a rule about membership of a logical class: 'All Thous are: young, hoped early, and marked out for a treasure.' Now if, on the one hand, someone else makes up a rule about membership of a 'class' and tells me that, by that rule, I am a member of the defined class, and I say I'm not, his obvious reply is to say that he made up the rule so he knows whether I come under that rule or not; if I then point out some discrepancy in the wording of the rule which allows me to claim that the rule does not apply to me, and he then modifies the rule 'correcting' it to meet my objection, and then says that I do, still, come under that rule —obviously, such an exchange could go on for ever.

If it's a rule I can simply ignore ('OK, you say I'm a sweet youth. So what!'), I will presumably abandon the exchange ('I'm going, mate'). If on the other hand, I make up a rule about membership of a logical class: 'All Xs get up at 7 a.m. every day' and tell myself that I am an 'X' (i.e. I get up at 7 a.m. every day), I can then adjust either the rule or the behaviour to ensure my continuing membership of that (continually refined) class. But when someone else makes up a rule about membership of such a class ('All Xs get up at 7 a.m.') and assigns me to that class, I can't adjust the rule to fit my behaviour without its becoming a rule I have made up; I can only adjust my behaviour to fit the rule (which I may or may not want to do) if I am to 'remain' a member of the class designated by the rule.

But what, thirdly, would be the case if I tried to both 'follow' a rule made up by someone else (i.e. adjusted my behaviour) and yet also made up the 'same' rule myself (i.e. I could modify the rule to fit my behaviour)? This situation is, of course, inherently unstable (even if possible): if I couldn't modify the rule, I couldn't claim to have made it up myself, but if I did modify it I couldn't claim to be following the 'same' rule that was made up by someone else. But who could decide that the rule I made up and the rule someone else made up were the 'same' rule anyway?

Well, the reader of 'Thou whose sweet youth... ' is in a position analogous to that third one mentioned. The reader both makes up the rule ('All readers/ addressees are: sweet youths') since he speaks in the voice of the persona he has attributed to the 'author' and makes up the rule himself in deciding whether as 'reader' he fits it. If he decides that he doesn't, he modifies his behaviour (he adopts the impersona of one who does) in order to remain in that class (i.e. to go on reading). But this means that the reader is doubly-positioned: if he decides that he does not fit the rule and adjusts his behaviour accordingly, then he is no longer 'making up the rule' but rather following one made up by someone else; but he 'makes up' that someone else too since he 'plays' that 'someone else' (he speaks in the voice of the

'author'); but if he makes up the one who makes up the rule, isn't he making up the rule as well, so he can modify the rule to fit his behaviour rather than his behaviour to fit the rule? At the same time, of course, it is he who 'decides' that the rule made up by the 'author' and the rule which classifies him as addressee are the 'same' rule—since it is he who makes the rules the 'same'.

All this may seem a long-winded, and perfectly idiotic, way of saying that the reader has to 'decide' what the text 'means' and that the author necessarily has to leave him to do so. It might also seem an indirect, and not very useful, way of talking about the problem of 'imaginative identification'. It is. But if we now go back to 'The Dedication' this roundabout way of analysing what happens, logically, when I read 'Thou whose sweet youth ... ' might be seen to be relevant. Try re-reading 'The Dedication':

Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee;
Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came,
And must return. Accept of them and me,
And make us strive, who shall sing best thy name.
Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain:
Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain.

How do I read it? Since, one might say, the text is spoken in Herbert's 'own voice' and I am not Herbert, I have to attribute to the speaker a certain 'persona' which I 'rehearse', on the basis of what I 'know' about Herbert (and the Printers' purpose in the note is to give even the 'common' reader some 'knowledge' on the basis of which to do that).

But if the specified listener (implied reader or addressee) of this dedication is God, how can I, the actual reader, 'impersonate' God—and even eavesdropping involves attributing some im-persona to the addressee. To a limited extent, I can attribute certain 'characteristics' to 'God' (by

analogy of one kind or another) and I can also try to be guided by what I believe the 'actual' Herbert thought God's attributes were. The text itself might guide me in this: the designation 'Lord', for example, or the particular claim that 'from thee they came'. I might, for instance, 'interpret' this last phrase not as a claim that God had 'inspired' Herbert but as a more general claim that God is the 'source of all gifts'. But if I construct a 'set' of attributes for God in order to 'impersonate' that stipulated 'impersona', I probably (if I think within a particular Western theological tradition) run into some very specific logical problems.

I can specify, uniquely, a particular human being (the 'actual' Herbert) by, for example, constructing a 'rule' for a 'logical class': 'All George Herberts: were born at time T in place P'—and the more precise I make that specification the more it could be said that I was specifying *the* George Herbert (not just 3rd April 1593 in Montgomery Castle, but, say, 9.36 am on 3rd April). But this kind of specification involves a particular notion of 'space' and 'time' which—in the Western theological tradition—does not apply to God. I can also specify 'myself' (the actual reader) by saying 'I *here, now*' (this precise time, 7.01 am, and this precise place, the top of Mount Everest), and by saying 'here, now' I specify 'my' location without further laborious elaboration. But—in the Western theological tradition—'God' is 'everywhere, always', so He, too, could be said to be 'here, now', as well as 'outside space and time'. Moreover, if I ask whether the 'speaker' of 'The Dedication' (the 'textual author', not 'George Herbert') occupies a point in 'space and time', I might answer, perhaps, that he (it?) does—as a set of material designations on this page (which does occupy a point in space and time); but is that set of designations a logical class of which there is only 'one member', or can the 'same' set of designations include a number of 'instances' (the 'same' words on *that* page)?

This last question obviously raises the problem of how far a particular mode of production of a 'book' can ensure a 'material identity' of 'texts'. But I might also ask whether the

reader of a text is a 'sole member' of a class—the one who is reading this text from this book here and now—and there can't be a 'material identity' of two actual readers. But—in the Western theological tradition—the term 'material' does not apply to God anyway. So, in trying to 'impersonate' 'God' in 'listening' to this dedication, in occupying the position of the implied reader, in attributing characteristics to 'God', those 'attributes' *could* include His being 'present' 'here, now' while 'I' read, but not 'in' space and time and not 'materially'. It's difficult to conceive of such a position.

Though we might—in terms of one Western philosophical tradition—conceive of my 'mind' as a non-spatio-temporal non-material 'locus'. In which case 'God' might be said to 'occupy my mind' while I read. I might also, in terms of that philosophy, conceive of God, by analogy, as Himself a kind of 'mind'. And then could I say that while I read I read 'with the mind of God', or that while 'I' read God reads 'with my mind'? If that might be the case, then one could also speak of Herbert as writing 'with the mind of God', or of God writing 'with the mind of Herbert'. And—in one theological tradition—that is precisely a way of talking about 'inspiration'. But if that could be the case, then one might say, in a hallowed phrase, that this dedication is a 'word of God'—which is precisely what the text claims to be (on one reading of 'for from thee they came').

This admittedly rather complicated way of unpacking some lurking problems has been intended to reveal a certain complicity between the assertions of this text and the deep formal structure of its literary relations, i.e. of the relations set up between its 'speaker', its 'addressee' and its 'reader'. In other words, if you try to take seriously what the text says and if you try to read it 'seriously', you are implicated in, drawn into, a whole set of basic philosophical-theological positions. Or to put it another way, to probe the process of reading this text is to disclose some of the underlying premises of a certain religious 'ideology'.

If we do continue reading it, other facets of this ideology reveal themselves in all their tangled ideo-logic. Take the last two lines:

> Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain:
>
> Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain.

How do I read these lines? Say I try to construct (dramatically, in practice) a set of stipulated characteristics for the implied reader and 'decide' whether I 'fit' them. Can I seek any guidance from the text as to what those characteristics might be?

There are two sets of designations: 'who shall make a gain' and 'who shall hurt themselves or me', and they are posited as mutually exclusive categories. So I have to decide which of the two I fit. But how do I decide between them? I am caught here in a number of dilemmas.

Let's play first with a fairly simple and superficial one. If I take it that 'who shall make a gain' is a 'good' set to be in, and (therefore) that I am 'in' it, I can go on reading *The Temple* as myself. But if I decide that I am in the 'good' set, is it 'good' for me to decide that I am, since if we take 'good' as indicating 'morally good', we might feel ourselves a bit trapped since one theological tradition would murmur 'pride' at that point. Equally, if I decide that I am not in the 'good' set and am therefore morally bad, is that not a morally good (a humble) decision to arrive at, in which case how far does that good decision put me in the 'good set' after all? Alternatively, if I decide that I am in the 'bad' set, doesn't this mean that I should 'hope' to 'gain' from reading further—though this 'early hope' might be dashed pretty quickly by reading the next line again and deciding that since I am in the 'bad' set I should 'refrain'.

The unavoidable difficulty of 'good' and 'bad' being 'moral' categories arises here from there seeming to be no third option: since these are the only two stipulations and

are offered as alternatives, everybody must be in one or the other, but since the terms used imply a moral judgement everybody seems to be implicitly divided between 'the good' on the one hand and 'the bad' on the other. One must, in other words, come to some final judgement about oneself: a sheep or a goat, elect or damned.

Luckily, another theological tradition might come to mind instead, best exemplified by the monk who was asked 'Which is the best book on humility? ' and answered 'mine'. The burden of this (wiser?) tradition is that 'humility' is a matter of one neither presuming that one is saved nor presuming that one is damned, but is rather a matter of rightly judging oneself, knowing oneself for what one is—and if that includes having written the best book on humility it is a mark of humility to say so. But before the monk replies 'mine', he might ask: who decides that his is the best book on humility? And he might further ask, on re-reading his book rather more critically, whether anyone can 'judge' himself 'rightly'—which is partly a matter of whether only the 'good' can 'rightly' judge themselves but the 'bad' can't (it being a mark of goodness that one can judge oneself rightly). The wise monk might (and does, in one tradition) reply that one has to have an 'informed conscience'; but how do I examine my conscience to know whether it's correctly 'informed', and informed by whom? If it's informed by my confessor (say, some other monk) how do I know that he is appropriately informed —which is a matter of 'who judges the judge ?' (as one spectator called out at the trial of the Chicago Seven—and was promptly done for contempt of court).

Of course, all these questions are only variants on the question: can I know myself 'correctly', which is itself another variant on the question 'can I (logically) class myself? '

But in any case, and crucially, do the lines 'Turn their eyes hither. . . ' invite me to judge myself? Since they are addressed to God, it is God who is being requested to make the decision, to decide whom to cast in either role. And

'God' would seem eminently qualified to decide, since—in one philosophical tradition—He is qualified as the Good and as Omniscient (He knows everything), while—in one theological tradition—He is the Judge. And it is God who, in the end, 'informs' the conscience and can do so because He 'knows' me most intimately and can inform me about everything about me, which He does by 'speaking' not so much to my conscience but as my conscience or the Voice of God in me. Only God, in this tradition, finally knows what and who I am—and therefore only God can truthfully say 'I am who I am'. And since God knows everybody equally, only He can judge every person to be either elect or damned, either good or bad.

Yet I don't know what his criteria are, unless he tells me. And in the text of 'The Dedication', of course, I am not told what the criteria are for judging between 'who shall make a gain' and 'who shall hurt themselves or me' since the text doesn't specify any further. So, if I read these lines, I have to attribute to the 'impersona' of God some criteria 'He' might hold concerning these two categories, and in the light of those categories I can then decide whether to go on reading *The Temple* or not. But since the text doesn't give me any further guidance as to what those criteria might be, in 'making up' a 'rule' for membership of these two sets I am not even trying to make up the 'same' rule as the textual author (Herbert?), since the textual author leaves it to the specified addressee to decide what those criteria might be (which is perhaps fair enough if the addressee is also the ultimate author of the text anyway). We might conceive of George Herbert as believing that the criteria he would use would be the same as God's, but since the text stipulates that God should do the action of choosing ('Turn' and 'refrain' are both requests or prayers), I can't decide whether Herbert (or his attributed persona) and I agree about what he means (Herbert, I mean); I have to refer to a 'third person', whom the text specifies as God. But how can I know God's mind in the matter?

Only if God acts to tell me. But the action he is requested by the text to perform is either to 'turn' my eyes as reader to the rest of *The Temple* or to 'refrain' my eyes from reading the rest of *The Temple*. But has he the power to do so? If I do go on to read the next lines in *The Temple*—i.e. 'Thou, whose sweet youth and early hopes' etc.—is it because God has made me do so, has made me 'turn my eyes' upon these lines? If I do read them, he certainly can't have 'refrained' my eyes—but does that mean that he hasn't got the power to do so (in which case he isn't omnipotent) or does it mean that he hasn't answered the 'prayer' in the text (in which case he's a rather ungrateful patron), or does it mean that he has, somehow, answered that prayer but in terms that escape the dichotomy suggested to him: i.e. there is indeed a 'third option' between reading and not reading *The Temple*?

There are again various complicated possibilities here. If I have decided (how?) that I do not come into the category of those who will make a gain, and yet decide (do *I* decide?) to go on reading (in which case what 'gain' do I hope for?), but if, meanwhile, God has decided (would I know?) that I *do* come into that category, would I be disobeying my own rule but obeying God's in going on reading—in which case won't my obeying God mean that I will after all make a gain, and thereby contradict my own self-judgement? If, on the other hand, I have decided that I do come into the category of those who will make a gain, and therefore carry on reading, but in the meanwhile God has decided that I don't, will I be disobeying God's rule but obeying my own by going on reading—but if I am disobeying God's rule, won't that hurt me, so I've contradicted myself again.

I'd better not explore all the possible permutations involved here, or I'd bore you (or amuse you) too much, but one recurrent element would seem to be the logical possibility of my continuing to read *The Temple* even though God and I disagree about whether I should. This possibility is a logical possibility, but is it an actual possibility? For if God 'decides' something, doesn't that—in one old

tradition—constitute an effective decision? His word is a creating word; God only speaks performative utterances. And if he decides something about me and I nevertheless act 'otherwise', does that in fact also indicate a decision of his that I should act otherwise? In other words, who is responsible for my 'sin' of 'disobeying' God, and how did we get into the habit in the first place?

As an aside, and rather than quote the whole of *Paradise Lost* at this point, I'll quote here Herbert's 'The Judgement', one of the last poems in *The Temple* (just to show you that I have read the wholoe of it):

ALMIGHTIE Judge, how shall poore wretches brook
Thy dreadfull look,
Able a heart of iron to appall,
When thou shalt call
For ev'ry mans peculiar book?

What other means to do, I know not well;
Yet I heare tell,
That some will turn thee to some leaves therein
So void of sinne,
That they in merit shall excell.

But I resolve, when thou shalt call for mine,
That to decline,
And thrust a Testament into thy hand:
Let that be scann'd.
There thou shalt finde my faults are thine.

Herbert leaves it (necessarily) to God to decide how to take that last line—and his own word for it. So do I.

But if a 'decision' 'either way' to read the last lines of 'The Dedication' runs the reader into some fairly complex problems, is there, after all, a 'third option'? Remember that God, being God, might refuse the apparently logically exclusive alternatives suggested by the text: turn, or refrain. And insofar as I 'impersonate' God, I too might have to find that third way.

One could perhaps suggest a third way: could I perhaps read this dedication not as an actual dedication addressed to God, but 'as literature'? One might immediately ask, of course, whether God would then be 'responsible' for my reading a text as 'literature'. If he isn't, then 'reading literature' is the only (damned) thing in the world God is *not* responsible for, in which case reading literature is (perhaps) a sin (and criticism is maybe close to blasphemy). But if God is responsible for everything, he is also responsible for 'literature', in which case reading literature is (perhaps) reading God's word (and criticism is maybe close to commentary on the word of God). One might suggest moments in the history of Christian attitudes towards this peculiar activity called 'reading literature', in which both opinions have found their supporters. But what it would mean to read 'The Dedication' 'as literature'?

God knows. I don't.

But at least along the way I think I've discovered something of what's implicit in trying to read it at all: all the intertwined issues of Christian theology—God as omnipresent, omni-scient, omnipotent, the good, the judge, the voice of conscience, the author of his word, the silent, the enigmatic. That'll do for one seminar paper.

*

Dai's Doodle:

p = 'p is true' ; not-p = 'p is not true'	*(Asides)*
He believes that *p*; but *not-p*.	He believes.
I believe that *p*; but *not-p*.	*Credo quia absurdum?*
He knows that *p*; but *not-p*.	He does not know.
He knew that *p*; but *not-p*.	He did not know.
He believed that *p*; but *not-p*.	He did believe.
He believes that *p*.	He believes.
but I know that *p*.	How?
He believes that *p*.	Why?
but I know that *not-p*.	Why?
I *know* that *p*, but I *believe* that *not-p*.	My son is dead.

He believes that *p*,
but he knows that *not-p*;
therefore he makes-believe that *p*;
he tells me that *p*.

Is he writing fiction?

I believe him that *p*,
but I know that *not-p*.

I suspend disbelief?

He knows that *p*,
but he tells me that *not-p*.

He is lying.

I know that he knows that *p*
but he tells me that *not-p*. I believe he is lying
but I could be wrong.

He believes that *p*, but *not-p*;
he tells me that *not-p*. He is lying & telling me the truth.

He believes that *not-p*, but *p*;
he tells me that *not-p*. He is not lying & not telling me the truth.

He believes that I believe that he knows that *not-p*;
but I believe that *p*;
he tells me that *p*. I do not believe him.

He believes that *p*, but he knows that *not-p*;
therefore he only makes-believe that *p*;
he tells me that *p*;
I know that he only makes-believe that *p*;
therefore I make him believe that I believe him.
I don't know that *not-p*.

He tells me that p;
I believe in him;
therefore I believe that *p*. But *not-p*.

He believes that God exists;
he tells me that he makes-believe that God exists;
I believe him;
I make-believe that God exists.
I don't know that God does not exist.

He tells me that God exists. Who is he?

*

DAI: I should think so too, Chris! I'm glad you warned us not to take your paper too seriously! But I must admit I'm a bit baffled as to which bits to take seriously at all. Somewhere in your paper there is a tricky and puzzling problem, which I've been trying to get clear in my own mind

while you've been reading—I've been doodling away at the logic of 'belief'.

And it seems to me that you were confusing two rather different questions: what it means to 'make-believe' when we're reading a poem, and what it means to 'believe in' God; the fact that Herbert's 'Dedication' itself seems, to us, to couple these two problems together is what makes it peculiarly interesting, but I'm not sure that your implied conclusion holds: that somehow what's at stake is the question of whether 'literature' can exist at all.

Eliot had somewhat the same thought, in his essay on Dante. Remember in the body of the essay he makes that very simple distinction between 'philosophical belief' and 'poetic assent', but then in a note worries about his position and actually ends up making it conditional on there being 'literature' at all—but in a way that implies that such a condition might well be shaky. I'll give you the two passages:

> My point is that you cannot afford to ignore Dante's philosophical and theological beliefs, or to skip the passages which express them most clearly; but that on the other hand you are not called upon to believe them yourself. For there is a difference (which here I hardly do more than assert) between philosophical belief and poetic assent. I am not sure that there is not as great a difference between philosophical belief and scientific belief; but that is a difference only now beginning to appear, and certainly inapposite to the thirteenth century. In reading Dante you must enter the world of thirteenth-century Catholicism, which is not the world of modem Catholicism, as his world of physics is not the world of modern physics. You are not called upon to believe what Dante believed, for your belief will not give you a groat's worth more of understanding and appreciation; but you are called upon more and more to understand it. If you can read poetry as poetry, you will 'believe' in Dante's theology exactly as you believe in the

physical reality of his journey; that is, you suspend both belief and disbelief.

But then, in the note to section two of the essay:

> The theory of poetic belief and understanding here employed . . is similar to that maintained by Mr I.A.Richards (see his *Practical Criticism* pp. 179ff and pp.271ff.) . . I am in agreement with Mr Richards's statement on p. 271 (*op. cit.*). I agree for the reason that if you hold any contradictory theory you deny, I believe, the existence of 'literature' as well as of 'literary criticism'. We may raise the question whether 'literature' exists; but for certain purposes, such as the purpose of this essay on Dante, we must assume that there is literature and literary appreciations; we must assume that the reader can obtain the full 'literary' or (if you will) 'aesthetic' enjoyment without sharing the beliefs of the author. If there is 'literature', if there is 'poetry', then it must be possible to have full literary or poetic appreciation without sharing the beliefs of the poet. . . If you deny the theory that full poetic appreciation is possible without belief in what the poet believed, you deny the existence of 'poetry' as well as 'criticism'; and if you push this denial to its conclusion, you will be forced to admit that there is very little poetry that you can appreciate, and that your appreciation of it will be a function of your philosophy or theology or something else. If, on the other hand, I push my theory to the extreme, I find myself in as great a difficulty. I am quite aware of the ambiguity of the word 'understand'. In one sense, it means to understand without believing, for unless you can understand a view of life (let us say) without believing in it, the word 'understand' loses all meaning, and the act of choice between one view and another is reduced to caprice. But if you yourself are convinced of a certain view of life, then you irresistibly and inevitably believe that if anyone comes to

> 'understand' it fully, his understanding must terminate in belief. It is possible, and sometimes necessary, to argue that full understanding must identify itself with full belief.

Now, you seem to be adopting a rather similar line, but turning Eliot on his head: since—you imply—there can't finally be a distinction between 'philosophical belief' and 'poetic assent', between 'taking the poem seriously' and becoming embroiled in the peculiar logic of the poem, there can't be 'literature', or at least that this example can't be read 'as literature'. Let me see if I can clarify why the problem arises but also why I think there is, finally, a difference between 'belief' and, if you like, 'poetic understanding'.

There's a nice story about a professor who once taught me theology. He was going through a crisis of belief and every time he went to a eucharistic service he used to grapple mentally with himself as to whether he was sincere in going or not. By the time it got to the recitation of the Creed, he would be so exhausted by this battle with himself that he would be stretched out flat on one of the pews, and from there you'd hear, as the Creed began, his great booming voice: 'I BELIEVE IN GOD'—and then there'd be silence from him while the rest of the congregation continued to murmur their way politely through the rest of the Creed, until they got to 'and in Jesus Christ', at which point he would join in again, booming over everyone else, 'AND IN JESUS CHRIST', and then, in a kind of choked self-silencing, he'd stop again, utterly exhausted by this effort of concentration and selective affirmation. These were the only two bits of the Creed he felt he could affirm at the time without being intellectually dishonest.

Now, what interests me is precisely this sense of there being a difference between saying 'I believe in God' while honestly believing it, and refusing to say the rest of the Creed because one doesn't mean it, 'believe it' or 'believe in it'. It's a bit like your reader *trying to mean* 'The Dedication'.

But both of these instances seem to imply that saying something and saying that something with conviction, believingly, are different activities because the second is a kind of saying-plus-belief, a kind of two-tier operation: I both *say* 'I believe in God' and '*believe* in God'. But as soon as you ask what that 'plus' is, you get into familiar difficulties.

Rodney Needham's written a goodish book called *Belief, Language and Experience* which tries to tackle some of these difficulties. Among other things he traces the etymology and history of the word 'belief'. The complexity he uncovers is pretty unnerving—so that if I were asked what I 'mean' by the word 'belief', or, if you like, how the word 'belief' is used, I'd have considerable difficulty answering. But I think it's clear from Needham's analysis that to 'believe' (in) something can't be equated with having a feeling of 'belief', whatever else it may be. I'll come back to that later. At one point Needham draws an interesting parallel between affirming belief and Hume's analysis of 'making a promise', in the *Treatise* I, v. I'd better give you Needham's summary of Hume:

> Hume thought the performance of promises to be one of the three 'fundamental laws of nature' on which the peace and security of human society entirely depended (1888: 526); and, since a promise is characteristically a declaration made by an individual, there would seem a reasonable supposition that its performance corresponded naturally to an act of the mind. But, as Hume proved, it is not itself a natural phenomenon. A promise is not simply a resolution, for that alone never imposes any obligation; it is not a desire to perform what is promised, for we may bind ourselves without such a desire or even with an aversion; nor is it, he argued, the willing of the action that is promised, for a promise always concerns some future time, whereas the will has an influence only on present actions. Therefore, Hume concluded, the act of the mind that enters into a

promise 'must necessarily be the willing of that obligation, which arises from the promise' (516).

We need not follow Hume in his subsequent argument about moral sentiments, but may come directly to his conclusion: 'A promise . . is naturally something altogether unintelligible, nor is there any act of the mind belonging to it' (517). Moreover, if there were any act of the mind belonging to the promise, it could not naturally produce any obligation, for promises have no force antecedent to human conventions. Thus 'promises are human inventions, founded on the necessities and interests of society' (519). The necessity comes from the fact that society depends on the mutual performance of services, but since these cannot be finished at the same instant, it is unavoidable that one party be contented to remain in uncertainty. A special form of words is hence invented by which we bind ourselves to the performance of any action, and on which the other party can rely: this form of words constitutes a promise, 'which is the sanction of the interested commerce of mankind' (522).

By Hume's account, therefore, a type of declaration which might seem to be the expression of a distinct state of mind, and intrinsic to the individual, is no such thing. It is instead the expression through the individual of a social institution, and it exists and has a special force because it is intrinsic to social life. The natural act of the mind which promises express is resolution (522), but the expression of a resolution is not commonly supposed to entail an obligation; so 'we feign a new act of the mind, which we call willing an obligation' (513).

Needham goes on: 'A promise is quite distinct from an inner state or experience: the whole point is that it must be public and conventional. It is a performative utterance, and there is no implication that it must be accompanied by any special emotion, etc. '

Now, it seems to me that Needham, with Hume, has made one important point about 'promising': that it must be recognisable by someone else as being a promise, if only because it's normally (or necessarily) *to* someone else that we make a promise; and he's also used, almost *en passant*, Austin's term 'performative utterance' as the right term for promises. Needham is using Hume on promises to explore a similar case about 'believing', and this seems to imply that belief, or at least an affirmation of belief, must also be 'public and conventional', it must be recognisable as such by someone else, and that an affirmation of belief might be something like a performative utterance.

It's not entirely clear to me just how far Needham himself wants to pursue these parallels, but there are two obvious difficulties about any such parallel that I want to explore myself. One is that you could argue that the 'someone else' who must be able to recognise your affirmation of belief *as* an affirmation of belief is, ultimately. God, and that could mean—on a certain understanding of God—that 'belief' needn't be humanly 'public' or 'conventional'; except that insofar as you yourself have to recognise your affirmation to be one of belief you would need some 'public' rather than purely 'private' means of recognising it to be so.

The case of my theology professor is interesting here; the story partly makes sense because saying 'I believe in God' in a church during the communal recitation of the Creed is decidedly a public and conventional mode of affirmation. But is it a performative utterance and in what respects? It clearly isn't a performative utterance in the same way as making a promise or naming a ship is, since in those cases even if you said afterwards that you 'didn't mean it' you would still, according to the conventions, have made the promise or named the ship; you would, or could, still be held to your promise and the ship would still have the name you'd given it (though obviously there are differences between these two cases as well—it would be delightfully

Goon-like to name a ship and promptly say: 'But I didn't mean it').

But in the case of saying 'I believe in God' and then claiming you didn't mean it, it would be at least logically weird for anyone, including God, to 'hold you to it', even though that is precisely what some religious organisations try to do. (Though if you said you were lying, I suppose God could always reply that you were lying to yourself in claiming you were lying! Cranmer might be a case in point.)

What I have in mind is that the crucial moment for saying 'I believe in God', or for reciting the Creed, is at baptism, as an affirmation that you are entering a community, a public act governed by liturgical conventions. Being baptised includes, not accidentally, both the making of a promise—to renounce the devil, world, flesh and all that—and the conferring of a name. But what is 'performative' about that utterance is precisely the joining of a group, a church, an *ecclesia*. It's here that I suspect your initial point about a religion as a set of practices and relationships was deficient. You talked about the relations between God and believer, priest and layperson, etc., but you left 'believer' unclear since you didn't talk about the act of *entering into* that set of relations and practices, the act of 'conversion'. But it's when we think about the act of religious conversion that the parallels and differences between religious belief and poetic assent become clearer.

You see, a poem too could be regarded as a set of relations and practices, a kind of institution, which we 'enter into' by reading it. Remember that sentence of Wordsworth's in the *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads*:

> It is supposed, that by the act of writing in verse an Author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association; that he not only thus apprises the Reader that certain classes of ideas and expressions will be found in this book, but that others will be carefully excluded.

He even talks about this 'formal engagement' in terms of a 'promise' and a 'contract', though the precise terms of the promise aren't clear:

> I will not take upon me to determine the exact import of the promise which, by the act of writing in verse, an Author in the present day makes to his reader: but it will undoubtedly appear to many persons that I have not fulfilled the terms of an engagement thus voluntarily contracted.

Part of the point of the *Preface* is to argue for a new contract, a new expectation, a new promise—and he backs this up by pointing out how 'verse' has 'excited very different expectations' at different times. In other words, Wordsworth is trying to argue his readers, his public, into accepting a further change in the 'public' conventions; what the *Preface* is trying to do is ensure their conversion to those new conventions.

But of course this very argument shows that the promise of poetry has to be learned, that 'literature' too is constituted by conventions and agreements and that these change, they 'hold' only for a certain period, which is why we have to 'learn' those of a past period. Also, what Wordsworth is asking for is a certain change in expectations for *these* poems, not for every poem written by other poets: while reading these poems, accept the terms of my engagement not somebody else's. And of course since those terms are new he finds he has to spell them out—that, for him, 'poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', and he asks his readers particularly that 'in judging these Poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgement of others.' It's 'feelings' or 'feeling' that Wordsworth puts at the centre of his notion of poetry: 'Another circumstance must be mentioned which distinguishes these Poems from the popular poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein

developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling. '

Now, it seems to me that your way of talking about Herbert's 'The Dedication' is curiously Wordsworthian, partly because our whole notion of 'belief' itself has come to be essentially Wordsworthian: we tend to think that at the core of 'reading poetry', as at the core of 'religious believing', is a 'feeling' which gives importance to the action and situation, rather than *vice-versa*. I suspect that's why Wordsworth is so often regarded as a 'religious poet' and why Arnold could even suggest that 'literature' might replace 'religion'.

But isn't Herbert in fact operating with a quite different notion of 'belief'? Feelings, of course, have an important place in his poetry, as presumably in his religious commitment, but it is the 'action and situation' that is important; to act in a certain way, to enter into or accept a certain situation, may give importance to, may even give rise to, certain feelings, but to think of the feelings as giving importance to the actions and situation would be, for him, inappropriate.

Put that in terms of 'The Dedication': the dedication is precisely that, an act of dedication, a performative utterance, and by saying it he does it. That act may or may not be accompanied by particular feelings (but what would a dedicatory feeling be?). The reader can't be in that situation, perform that act; what the reader can do is read or not read the rest of the volume, but to read it is also to act, to enter on an engagement (and 'entry' is precisely what's implied by 'The Church Porch'), a commitment that implies consequences, just as 'entering the church' by being baptised is a commitment with consequences, involves living by certain rules of behaviour which you didn't 'make up'. And it's those rules of behaviour which are actually offered in 'The Church Porch': 'Beware of lust', 'Abstain wholly or wed', 'Drink not the third glasse', etc.—you stopped too early by only reading the first stanza. Insofar as 'The Dedication' is demanding a 'conversion' it's a public

conversion according to conventions, rules of public behaviour, not some private feeling of 'believing in God'.

Now, having said that, can we read *The Temple* as 'literature'? What would that mean, in this case at least? If our notion of what's involved in 'reading literature' is basically a Wordsworthian one, then we can try to do what Wordsworth says the poet does:

> . . it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs.

But if there aren't any 'feelings' involved—again, what's a dedicatory feeling?—we get into a tangle. So what are we doing when we read 'The Dedication' or 'The Church Porch' as literature?

Wordsworth's phrase, 'for short spaces of time', suggests one aspect: that—to use Eliot's terms for a moment—'poetic assent' is precisely 'for short spaces of time', the time it takes to read the poem. Such 'assent' doesn't involve any long-term commitment to consequences in terms of the rules of behaviour governing our life, though it may lead to them if we are in some way 'converted' by reading something ('It changed my life' etc.). 'Poetic assent' doesn't involve any consequences because we don't just 'suspend disbelief'; we 'suspend' the whole world, we put the whole world 'in brackets' while we read; to read a text as 'literature' is to enter into that situation—to perform an act of *epoché* curiously akin to that elusive device of the phenomenologists. But what does it mean to do that?

One suggestion would be that it's to make a performative utterance that's governed by conventions but which isn't 'public' in the sense Needham, or Austin, intended. Use a parallel: if I make a promise to myself, I have to have

available the public convention of 'promising' in order to do so, but whereas to make a public promise is to accept certain public consequences according to those conventions (not being trusted again if I break it, etc.), making a 'promise' to myself doesn't allow anyone else to insist on any consequences—which is why it's so easy to make and break promises to oneself (like 'I'll get up at 7 a.m. every day').

If you think of the various 'utterances' that Austin discusses in connection with 'performatives', it's clear that many of them are both relational (I do something to, for, or with someone else) and imply some associated feeling (I apologise, I congratulate, I condole, etc.)—what he barbarously calls 'behabitives'—but the implied feeling isn't essential to the performative. Now, in real life we don't say 'I offer you my condolences' *in order to* have the feeling of sorrow, pity, or whatever; but it may be that, along Wordsworthian lines, someone might want to 'bring his feelings nearer to' those of someone condoling (why Wordsworth or anyone else should want to do such a thing is another matter); one way of 'condoling' someone is to write to them, of course, and given the association of the act of condoling with 'having a feeling', a 'good' letter of condolence doesn't just say 'I condole you', it attempts to enact feelings of sorrow, pity, regret, to communicate all the feelings one is conventionally supposed to have.

Now it may be a curious thing to do, but one can imagine people reading letters of condolence not written to them, or by them, because 'the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation' of reading the letter! In the case of declarations of love, it seems to be an extraordinarily common habit to read or listen to declarations not written to or by oneself—we call it reading love-poems or listening to Radio 1 pop songs. What's involved in these instances is something like 'making a promise to oneself', at least in the case of reading (listening is rather different): a private act that only makes sense at all in terms of a public convention. To make a promise, or a declaration of love, does logically require someone else to do

it to, yet actually to make the promise or declaration to someone else involves one in possible public consequences; if all you want is the feeling and not the consequences, the only person you can involve is yourself, you have to keep the whole thing to yourself—which is maybe why reading literature is such a private activity these days, but that's another story.

Now it may be that having got used to Wordsworthian premises, having learned those poetic conventions, we might try to extend them to other kinds of 'performative utterances' where feelings aren't involved at all—like warnings, advice, even assertions (like *Beyond the Fringe*'s reading of British Rail's 'Gentlemen lift the seat', as a loyal toast!)—but we would still be 'looking for' the feelings which could be associated with or accompany those utterances; it would still be the feelings that would 'give importance to the actions or situations'; so we might even try to read the warnings and advice in 'The Church Porch' as if they were expressing some elusively complex feeling — though I doubt if many readers have succeeded in doing so with that poem (they then write it off as an unsuccessful poem).

I suspect that the Wordsworthian habit is now so engrained, or deeply learned, that we find it difficult, in England anyway, to 'read poetry' in any other way, however marginally satisfying the results. And it seems to me that that's eventually what you were doing, or trying to do, with 'The Dedication'. On the other hand, if you think of one kind of 'performative utterance' that Austin mentions in a footnote to *How to Do Things with Words*, a wholly different approach might be glimpsed:

> I am told that in the hey-day of student duelling in Germany it was the custom for members of one club to march past members of a rival club, each drawn up in file, and then for each to say to his chosen opponent as he passed, quite politely, *Beleidigung*, which means 'I insult you'.

A whole mode of non-Wordsworthian reading is implied there!

The point of the polite statement '*Beleidigung*' is, of course, its consequences not its emotion; if one could create certain kinds of performative utterance, devoid of resonant emotion, and also without public consequences, one might have again shifted the conventions of 'literature', perhaps even with retrospective possibilities. Two examples spring to mind: in both cases fully to enter into the 'action and situation' the reader does actually have to perform not 'utterances' but actions. The first is quintessentially private, a literal playing with oneself; the second gains its point partly from the awareness that some time, some-where, thousands of other solitary people in quiet rooms will perform the same ludicrous actions—and there lies Samuel Beckett's promise of laughter. The first is from *Murphy*, his first published novel, the second from *Still*, one of his later prose-pieces.

White (MURPHY)	Black (MR ENDON)
1. P—K4	1. Kt—KR3
2. Kt—KR3	2. R—KKt1
3. R—KKt1	3. Kt—QB3
4. Kt—QB3	4- Kt—K4
5. Kt—Q5	5. R—KR1

—and so on, including the notes. And:

> Quite still then all this time eyes open when discovered then closed then opened and closed again no other movement any kind though of course not still at all when suddenly or so it looks this movement impossible to follow let alone describe. The right hand slowly opening leaves the armrest taking with it the whole forearm complete with elbow and slowly rises opening further as it goes and turning a little deasil till midway to

> the head it hesitates and hangs half open trembling in mid air. Hangs there as if half inclined to return that is sink back slowly closing as it goes and turning the other way till as and where it began clenched lightly on end of rest. Here because of what comes now not midway to the head but almost there before it hesitates and hangs there trembling as if half inclined etc. Half no but on the verge when in its turn the head moves from its place forward and down among the ready fingers...

—and so on, including the pauses.

Of course, to read Herbert's 'The Dedication', retrospectively, as a game of empty but amusing logical gestures would require a pretty perverse sense of humour.

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Ellen's Diagrams:

LN: I really think you're being *extremely* inaccurate about Chris's paper. It's basically *irrelevant* to the argument whether we feel or believe anything while we read 'The Dedication'. What Chris is *really* looking for is a *theory* of reading, but, as usual, s/he's not been *rigorous* enough in the analysis. Feelings have got nothing to do with the problem of whether a text is literature; what we need is a *theoretical* framework in which we can precisely locate the *concept* of literature. There are some totally *untheorised* terms playing across Chris's discourse—terms like 'impersona', 'stipulated', 'postulated', 'overhearing', 'rehearsing'. The paper's logical *cul-de-sacs* about religious ideology are interesting, but they go *nowhere* because they're utterly premature; what s/he should have done was elaborate *systematically* that part of the argument about reading.

I've drawn a small diagram which I want you all to look at. It should *clarify* the possible permutations. Of course, it's a very provisional sketch, what Althusser calls a *descriptive theory*, and it'll have to be *totally re-thought* at some point and somehow integrated with Pecheux's discourse-analysis and with Foucault's theory of discursive formations, and there's some recent work in Rumanian semiotics that I . . Oh. Yes. The diagram. I've used some terms from recent work in some rather dubiously bourgeois sociology, but it's basically *developed* from Chris's own vocabulary and *systematises* that vocabulary at a higher level.

LN's Diagram

[Editor's Note: At this point the speaker apparently moved to the blackboard in order to draw the diagram mentioned. Unfortunately, this resulted in a loss of audibility on the tape-recording. For the next fifteen minutes or so, therefore, only fragments of the commentary are decipherable. These are given in full below, with ellipses indicated by (... ϰϰϰϰ.....). In these circumstances, it is particularly to be regretted that none of those present at the seminar transcribed the diagram concerned and that no reliable reconstruction of it has proved to be possible. It was, however, clearly concerned with the systematically possible relationships between different 'textual voices', in the activities of both writer and reader. This much at least is apparent from the opening remarks. Since most of the exposition was decidedly emphatic *we have left it to the reader to add as many italics as preferred.]*

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Let me explicate the diagram, concisely and systematically.

First, the writer writing. The writer trans-impositions determinate apparatus positions and practices; they are reconstituted as textual designations ('the words on the page'). The particular apparatus is variable, and therefore so are the detailed inflections of the textual voice. But there are basically three modalities of textual voice possible, which I've characterised as 'own voice', 'dramatic voice', and 'voice-over'. These are related to, or can posit, four categories of textual reader (or implied reader): 'listener', 'addressee', 'under-study', and '*repetiteur*'. But not all categories of textual reader can be posited by each voice.

There are six basic possibilities.

One: own voice/listener. Example: a private letter.

I write a private letter to someone I know. I posit that specific someone as listening to my own voice in which I pronounce as textual speaker. The voice is a private voice and the relation between speaker and listener (the relation constituted in the text) is that of *confidant(e)*. In writing, I presume privacy, i.e. that no one apart from the specific reader will read the letter (no eavesdropper). Clearly, this suggests the (illusorily) close affinity between letter-writing and face-to-face oral communication: the text seeks to be transparent, a mode of presence, with the whole idealist metaphysics that involves

(. . ?????. . .)

However, (iii) cannot in practice occur without (iv), though they are analytically distinct. The writer, assuming a dramatic voice, posits the textual reader as, necessarily, adopting the same dramatic voice while s/he reads: the reader is posited as understudy to the persona which stimulates a replaying of the persona, a close imitation. The textual author acts as actor-director, demanding of the understudy more precise fidelity to the details and nuances of the role than that required for an impersona. An example of (iii) and (iv) clearly in operation together would be 'Bishop Blougram's Apology':

So, you despise me, Mr Gigadibs.
No deprecation,—nay, I beg you, sir!
Beside 'tis our engagement: don't you know,
I promised, if you'd watch a dinner out,
We'd see truth dawn together?—
. . You do despise me then.
And if I say 'despise me',—never fear—
I know you do not in a certain sense—
Not in my arm-chair for example: here,
I well imagine you respect my place.. .

The textual reader is here assigned two roles, replaying the persona in the Bishop's dramatic voice, while attending to that voice as Mr Gigadibs (stipulated as despising that persona yet deprecating that despising, etc.). In 'The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' we perhaps have (iv) with a variation on (iii): the persona talks to himself and himself plays his imagined impersonae ('Let us go then, you and I'; 'Oh, do not ask, "What is it?" '; ' "That is not it at all/That is not what I meant, at all." '). In 'Gerontion' we perhaps have (iv) with (iii/a), if 'you' in the line 'I would meet you upon this honestly' is taken to be Christ rather than specifically the reader.

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What of a voice-over that isn't directed at a stipulated class of reader but at 'everybody'? Such a voice would be broadcasting to 'the public', but since a public audience is made up of specific listeners, each listener is postulated as a 'representative' of that public, and, since the public is 'everybody', that includes the presenter as well, so the presenter presents him/her-self as also a representative of

the public. S/he therefore speaks in her/his 'own voice' but her/his 'own public voice', while the audience is postulated as listening as themselves, as each specific person yet also as undifferentiated everyone. *The Radio Times* reveals this structure clearly. For example:

10.30 MAIN NEWS with Angela Rippon

Rippon is the 'presenter' of *The News*; we are 'with' her, since she too is a member of the public, and she too therefore 'listens to the news' while she 'reads' it. She, of course, only reads the news; whoever writes it and determines it is left coyly undeclared.

(. . ⁂⁂⁂. .)

Is this lengthy paragraph to be attributed to a *Radio Times* staff-writer, or to 'the presenter Anthony Smith', or to the producer David Patterson? We don't know who *wrote* the words—but they present themselves as written by somebody, so as we read them we 'repeat' the style, tone, rhythm, of the way they're written, yet not in a dramatic voice (as understudy to a persona); we repeat them in 'our own voice'. Insofar as the words are directed at 'everybody' as themselves, we don't need to adopt an impersona (Mr. Gigadibs) either, so again we read 'as ourselves'. Yet we didn't write the paragraph, so in repeating it as ourselves we receive it simply as given, as originating from no other source than the page itself, and since it is in 'our own voice' that we 'hear' it, we tend to endorse it as what we already know: we are telling ourselves something that seems curiously familiar, or at least innocuous. To recognise explicitly that someone else, someone specific, is telling us this would be to turn this deeply ideological paragraph from anonymous information into challengeable assertion. The term I've chosen for this interesting, and wide-spread,

anonymity, this reduplication of a non-dramatic voice in our own voice, is 'over-hearing': we over-hear ourselves saying something. The reader in this case is a *repetiteur*—it seems an appropriate word to pinch from the French: assistant-master (in charge of Prep.), private tutor or coach, chorus-master (theatrical). No, I am not thinking of the overtones of French mistress.

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But if Chris's points about reading are to have any general validity they must be developed to accommodate all texts, from a British Rail notice saying 'Passengers cross the footbridge by the line only' to George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. But in much of *Middlemarch*, unlike 'The Dedication', the reader is not being addressed, is not put in the position of *impersona* or even understudy. As s/he reads the text, s/he over-hears the text's voice-over and thereby is positioned as repetiteur of the text's presenter:

> Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress.

This is information, anonymous knowledge, not addressed to anyone specific or to any class of reader but presented for everyone, anyone, to read; and I don't read it in anyone's voice except my own, I repeat it like a lesson remembered, or over-hear it while I (perhaps) visualise what is 'described':

> Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters.

The peculiar effectivity of this mode of writing lies precisely in the conflation of the reader's own voice with that of the textual author; since the textual author has no definitely dramatic persona ('Here I am, an old man') and the textual reader has no definite im-persona ('You despise me, Mr Gigadibs'), the conflation of tone, pace, 'style', is achieved without effort or dramatic exertion, easily, casually, intimately, 'naturally', 'immediately'. And the inclusion of dramatic voices—those of the 'characters'—reinforces the union of the narrative-voice with my own voice: as I read a dialogue passage interspersed by, supported by, narrative comment, the very demand of adjusting to the oscillating personae/impersonae relations 'between' the character-voices allows the non-dramatic narrative-voice to be assumed as almost wholly 'my own'. In that effect of 'overhearing' my 'own' comments lies the deepest truth-effect, the insidious credibility of the commentary, the unobtrusively acceptable 'knowledge' of the text, the barely-refusable status of the 'already-known'.

(. . ZZZZZ. .)

These 'textual relations' between textual voices and posited readers are in many cases transpositions of the adopted voices and posited relations in actual social relations, while those textual relations can themselves be further transposed by texts, as in much modernist writing. But, crucially, of course, the whole point about a 'literary' work, a work of 'literature', is the way in which reading it demands, but doesn't guarantee, a re-duplication of the reader's voice with the textual voices: you don't read a novel or a poem, as you might read a letter or a public notice or a work of history or criticism, to get the *gist* of it, the content that a *précis* or second-hand account might give; a novel is constructed as a play of voices, as a particular and shifting set of relations between voice and reader (Thackeray knew this better than most). It's to enter into those relations and enact that play of voices that we read a literary text. Which also means that we

can locate the limits of 'literature': only some textual relations can be transposed into 'literary' relations.

We can see this even more clearly if we now look at the *lower* half of the diagram, and analyse the process of reading as an activity of re-impositioning, of recreating (but not necessarily complementing) those textual positions, relations and voices. Again, we can approach this systematically, taking each textual relation in turn. Thus, if we go back to (i), reading a private letter, and /

PHIL:

/ L!! Will you *shut up*! If you try to go 'systematically' and 'rigorously' through the rest of that grotty diagram, I'll strangle you. The things got more flaws in it than a skyscraper. It's not rigorous, it's not systematic, it's not even original. And you haven't read Wolfgang Iser and his mob. You could go on all day adding, defining, refining your terms and at the end of it all you couldn't do anything with them—I know you! All this pseudo-scientificity is worse than useless, it's just the latest way of appearing to be 'radical'. If you can somehow present yourself as taking up an intransigently systematic, rigorous stance about the concept of literature or realism or whatever, that's somehow supposed to guarantee a political intransigence. It doesn't even guarantee political coherence. In any case what you're offering are metaphors not concepts. You talk about locating the limits of literature. Rubbish. What would you do with Shklovsky's *Letters not about Love*? Where would that fit into your neat little diagram? Don't answer, I'm not interested. Look, your metaphors are interesting, 'cos they're all we've got, but where you go barmy is in not grasping that we can only think in metaphors and metaphors can't be systematised; look what happened to Aristotle. Yea, I've read me Derrida. Take the metaphors seriously, think with them, and you might get somewhere.

While you were jabbering on about theatrical voices and producers, directors, casting agents and all the rest, I was thinking about Diderot, Stanislavsky, Brecht. If you want to talk about theatre, read them and try and do some real acting. Then you might see that your 'distinctions' between 'own voice' and 'dramatic voice' simply don't work. Let me calm down. I'll read you something that might show you what I mean. So, are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin.

Phil's Description

I was still in this state of inner division, uncertainty and ceaseless search for something I could not find, when I went into the general dressing-room where we would all have to put on our costumes and make-up together instead of by ourselves. The buzz and racket of the conversation made it difficult to concentrate. And yet I felt that this moment of my first investiture in that mildewed morning coat, as well as the putting on of the yellowish grey wig, beard, and the rest, was one of extreme importance to me. Only those material things could prompt me to find what I had subconsciously been searching for. On this moment I had pinned my last hope.

Our dressing-room resounded with exclamations, just as though the occasion were some ordinary amateur performance.

'Why, I'd never know you!' —'Don't tell me that's you?'—'Amazing! ' —'Good work, I didn't think you had it in you!'—and so on indefinitely.

These exclamations drove me wild, and the remarks, tinged with doubt and dissatisfaction which fell to my share, quite disheartened me.

'Something is wrong. . I don't know just what it is. . who is he?' 'I don't understand, who are you supposed to be?'

How awful it was for me to listen to these remarks and questions when I had nothing to reply!

Who was I trying to represent? How did I know? If I had been able to guess I should have been the first to tell who I was.

And I heartily wished the make-up man in the nether regions. Until he had come along and transformed my face into that of a routine pallid theatrical blond I had felt I was on the track of discovering my secret identity. . . .

Finally they all went off to the school stage to be inspected by Tortsov. I sat alone in the dressing-room, completely prostrated, helplessly gazing in the mirror at my featureless theatrical face. Inwardly I was already convinced of my failure. I decided not to present my self to the Director but to take off my costume and remove my make-up with the aid of some horrid looking greenish cream which stood before me. I had already put one finger in it and begun to rub it on my face. And . . I went on rubbing. All the other colours blurred, like water-colour which has fallen into some liquid. My face turned greenish-greyish-yellowish, like some counterpart to my costume. It was difficult to distinguish where my nose was, or my eyes, or my lips. I smeared some of the same cream on my beard and moustache and then finally all over my wig. Some of the hair clotted into lumps . . and then, almost as though I were in some delirium, I trembled, my heart pounded, I did away with my eyebrows, powdered myself at random, smeared the back of my hands with a greenish colour and the palms with light pink. I straightened my coat, and gave a tug to my cravat. I did all this with a quick, sure touch, for this time I knew who I was representing and what kind of a fellow he was!

With my high hat on at a slightly rakish angle I was suddenly aware of the style of my full-cut and once stylish trousers, which were now so worn and threadbare. I made my legs fit the crease which had formed in them by turning my toes sharply in. This gave me ridiculous legs.

Have you ever noticed how ridiculous the legs of some people are? I have always had a sense of aversion towards such people. As a result of this unusual posture of my legs, I seemed shorter and my gait was quite changed. For some reason my whole body was slightly inclined to the right side. All I needed was a cane. One was lying near-by so I picked it up although it did not exactly fit the picture of what I had in mind. Now all I lacked was a quill pen to stick behind my ear or hold in my teeth. I sent a call boy for one and while waiting for his return paced up and down the room, feeling how all the parts of my body, features, facial lines, fell into their proper places and established themselves. After walking around the room two or three times, with an uncertain, uneven gait I glanced in the mirror and did not recognise myself. Since I had looked into it the last time a fresh transformation had taken place in me.

'It is he, it is he!' l exclaimed, unable to repress the joy that was suffocating me. If only that quill would come, then I could go up to the stage.

I heard footsteps in the corridor. Evidently it was the call boy bringing me the quill. I rushed to meet him and at the door ran straight into Rakhmanov.

'What a fright you gave me!' burst from him. 'My dear fellow, who on earth is this? What a get-up! Is it Dostoyevskii? The Eternal Husband? Can it be you—Kostya? What are you supposed to be?'

'A critic!' I answered in a hoarse voice, and with sharp diction.

'What critic, my boy?' Rakhmanov continued his query, somewhat taken aback by my bold and penetrating glance.

I felt like a leech clinging to him.

'What critic?' I retorted with obvious intent to insult him. 'The fault-finding critic who lives inside of Kostya Nazvanov. I live in him in order to interfere with his work. That is my great joy. That is the purpose of my existence.'

I was myself amazed at the brazen, unpleasant tone and the fixed, cynical, rude stare which accompanied it, and with which I addressed Rakhmanov. My tone of voice and self-confidence upset him. He did not know how to find a new angle of approach and therefore was at a loss what to say to me. He was quite disconcerted.

'Let's go,' he finally said rather uncertainly. 'The others have long since begun.'

'Let's go, then, since they have long since begun,' I mimicked his words and did not budge but continued to stare brazenly at my disconcerted instructor.

An awkward pause ensued. Neither of us moved. It was obvious that Rakhmanov wanted to get this incident over with as quickly as possible but did not know how to go about it. Fortunately for him at this moment the call boy came running with the goose quill. I snatched it from his hand and stuck it between my lips. This narrowed my mouth into a straight, angry line. The sharpened point on one side of my lips and the broad flare of feathers on the other underscored the corrosive expression of my face.

'Let's go,' repeated Rakhmanov in a low, almost shy voice.

'Let's go!' My mimicking tone was caustic and brazen.

We walked onto the stage.

*

OK, that's from Constantin Stanislavsky's *Building a Character*, written around 1937 and brilliantly translated by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood for Max Reinhardt back in 1950—and what's still engrossing and fascinating about it is that it's *true*. If you've ever created a role, or created anything, you can see what he's talking about.

Kostya spent days before this exercise in a state of bafflement, inertia, distraction, self-division, as if he was almost possessed by some other personality yet not quite, as though he'd been drained of his own personality but without another one filling the emptiness —'it was as though I had forgotten something, could neither recall nor find it.' It's a very peculiar state. But what's really interesting is that what seems to be at stake is Kostya's own 'self'.

It's very tricky to get this right. Stanislavsky sometimes gives the impression that an actor should 'lose himself' in a part. In *An Actor Prepares* he says '. . the very best thing that can happen is to have the actor completely carried away by the play. Then regardless of his own will he lives the part, not noticing how he feels, not thinking about what he does, and it all moves of its own accord, subconsciously and intuitively.' But it's a lot more complex than that: even when Kostya was taken over by 'the Critic', he says, 'I still did not lose the sense of being myself . . Actually I was my own observer at the same time that another part of me was being a fault-finding, critical creature.' It's the old, old problem that Diderot explored in his *Paradoxe sur le comédien*; he too says that the actor 'must have in himself an unmoved and disinterested onlooker.'

It's Bertolt Brecht, of course, who's emphasised the Diderot approach this century, and Brecht's often sharply contrasted with Stanislavsky. He implies the contrast himself when he quotes Reumert:

> If I feel I am dying, and if I really feel it, then so does everybody else; if I act as though I had a dagger in my hand, and am entirely filled by the one idea of killing the child, then everybody shudders. . . The whole business is a matter of mental activity being communicated by emotions, or the other way round if you prefer it: a feeling so strong as to be an obsession, which is translated into thoughts. If it comes off it is the most infectious thing in the world; anything external is then a matter of complete indifference.

Or Rapaport:

> This is the central feature of our method of work on the part. . . Take any object, a cap for example; lay it on the table or on the floor and try to regard it as though it were a rat; make-believe that it is a rat, and not a cap . . Picture what sort of rat it is; what size, colour? . . We thus commit ourselves to believe quite naively that the object before us is something other than it is and, at the same time, learn to compel the audience to believe . .

Brecht says that Rapaport is describing 'a course of acting, supposedly according to Stanislavsky's method', and against this 'supposedly' Stanislavskian method Brecht wanted his actors to develop an 'alienated' way of acting:

> The actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying. He is not Lear, Harpagon, Schweik; he shows them. He reproduces their remarks as authentically as he can; he puts forward their way of behaving to the best of his abilities and knowledge of men; but he never tries to persuade himself (and thereby others) that this amounts to a complete transformation. Actors will know what it means if I say that a typical kind of acting without this complete transformation takes place when a producer or colleague shows one how to play a particular passage. It is not his own part, so he is not completely transformed; he underlines the technical aspect and retains the attitude of someone just making suggestions.

Brecht's own suggestions for practising and achieving this alienated acting include the rehearsal techniques of transposing speeches into the third person or the past tense,

or speaking the stage directions out loud; but there's one suggestion he makes which I want to pick out:

> The actor should refrain from living himself into the part prematurely in any way, and should go on functioning as long as possible as a reader (which does not mean a reader-aloud). An important step is memorizing one's first impressions.
>
> When reading his part the actor's attitude should be one of a man who is astounded and contradicts. Not only the occurrence of the incidents, as he reads about them, but the conduct of the man he is playing, as he experiences it, must be weighed up by him and their peculiarities understood; none can be taken as given, as something that 'was bound to turn out that way', that was 'only to be expected from a character like that'.
>
> Before memorizing the words he must memorize what he felt astounded at and where he felt impelled to contradict. For these are dynamic forces that he must preserve in creating his performance.

Now you can probably see where I'm going. It's when you think about *reading* that it's possible to drive these different emphases of Stanislavsky and Brecht even further apart. What I mean is that for some people reading fiction seems to involve a complete identification, empathy, losing yourself, 'becoming' the characters or author, whereas other people want to hold back, observe, register what they're reading. The most extraordinary account of reading that I know seems almost to oscillate between these two attitudes, but to come down more with the first. Proust's *On Reading* talks at one point about the function of silence while we're reading:

> . . silence does not bear, like speech, the trace of our defects, of our grimaces. It is pure, it is truly an atmosphere. Between the author's thoughts and ours it does not interpose those irreducible elements of our different egotisms which refuse to submit to thought. The very language of the book is pure (if the book deserves that name), made transparent by the author's thought which has removed everything from it that was not itself, to the point of giving it back its faithful image; each sentence, in essence, resembling the others, for all are spoken with the unique inflection of a personality.

At another point he talks about the way reading can stimulate 'certain minds . . which a kind of laziness or frivolity prevents from descending spontaneously into the deep regions of the self where the true life of the mind begins'; 'what is necessary', he says, in these cases, 'is an inter-vention which, while coming from another, takes place in our own inmost selves, which is indeed the impetus of another mind, but received in the midst of solitude. Now we have seen that this was precisely the definition of reading, and that it fitted reading only. ' This 'definition of reading' almost collapses 'another mind' and 'our own inmost selves' into one, an absorption of the one into the other, though not quite.

So I think that Chris's account of reading 'The Dedication' tried to combine Proust's emphasis and Brecht's—like Brecht's actor reading his part, she took nothing for granted, pulled up sharp, was astounded, contradicted, tried to make sense of the part she was being asked to play, but what she was basically astounded at was the notion—Proust's notion—of this intervention or impulse of another mind taking place in her own inmost self. Try to combine those two and you end up with Chris's dilemmas.

I suspect though that Chris's paradoxes are related to Brecht and Proust in the same way that Brecht saw Vakhtangov's theatrical approach as related to Meyerhold and Stanislavsky:

> Viewed dialectically, Vakhtangov is the Stanislavsky-Meyerhold complex *before* the split rather than its reconciliation later.

Chris's dilemmas are the Brecht-Proust complex before the split rather than its reconciliation later. I'd better explain that a bit more.

You see, I think there's a deeply intractable problem about Chris's account, insofar as it aligns with Proust rather than with Brecht; it's the old problem of the 'self'. Like Proust, she seems to be operating with a notion of 'the inmost self' and it's the disorientation and disintegration of that self which the Brechtian part of her observes with such puzzlement: she can't pull the divergent bits of that self together, and she starts asking daft questions like 'can I class myself?' Basically, Chris's notion of the self is a Cartesian one, a self defined as a consciousness: all her dilemmas take place in her consciousness; reading for her is a 'purely mental state', as Proust calls it in *A la recherche du temps perdu*—remember that long passage where Marcel talks about the 'zone of consciousness', the 'abyss', that comes between him and reality except when he's reading, because then reality itself dissolves into consciousness.

Now—to pick up a point of Dai's—Chris's notion of meaning is tied to this, so that she *wants to mean* what she says as if meaning were some kind of internal accompaniment of saying, an event in her mental self, in her consciousness. Well, that whole notion has been rightly hammered by Wittgenstein, Ryle and the Oxford lads; that kind of two-tier notion of meaning won't stand up any more.

But what remains problematic is that there still seems to be a kind of doubleness at work, a two-tiered self, when we read, which Chris's account brings out very well—a disjunction between your real self, your actual everyday, ordinary self, with its everyday beliefs and feelings and what-not, and the beliefs, feelings, personality, that the reading self seems to have to adopt in order to read 'properly'. Stanislavsky's pupil who finds himself turning into a Critic has the same problem—it's as if his 'real' self were somehow undermined and partly replaced by, or revealed as, another self.

But if we try to think about the self, the ordinary everyday self, without collapsing back into a Cartesian notion of consciousness, how can we think about it? It's here that 'the paradox of the actor' seems to bite very deep indeed. Because our very notion of 'self' seems already saturated with theatrical metaphors: the very word 'person' has overtones of *persona*, a mask, a theatrical role. We talk about 'playing a role', in such a way that almost everything we do seems to be a matter of role-playing. Shakespeare wasn't just being biassed towards his own *metier* when he gave us those inevitable quotes—'All the world's a stage', 'Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player/ That struts and frets his hour upon the stage', 'I hold the world but as . . /A stage where every man must play a part', 'this great stage of fools'. Walter Ralegh had said it before him—'What is our life? a play of passion', The sociologists have said it, *ad nauseam*, since. Even Sartre can't do without the stage—his Kean makes every existentialist seem like a bit-player looking for a decent role, an author in search of half a dozen characters. And if you probe Marx's or Freud's metaphors you come up with drama all over the place—we're all personifications of our economic positions, the unconscious is another scene, a representation in a hidden theatre. Goldsmith pinned us all down when he said that Garrick on the stage was natural, simple, affecting—but off-stage he was acting. We all see ourselves in Hamlet, but Hamlet sees himself as having to act a part—think of him in Act I, slipping in and out of character, his student character, till his

old college chums don't know whether he's gone mad or not.

If the notion of the self is an ideological one, its ideology is largely derived from the theatre, so it might be from Brecht's attack upon the theatre that we can develop an attack on the ideology of the self—think even of Brecht's early play *Man is Man* and the note to it: 'He is lived'. But I don't think that can be done just by a kind of psychological juggling with the self, a kind of merely psychological distancing from the roles we play, a standing outside of them while we play them, like Brecht's actors.

It's important to do that, yes, if only because there's a parallel between Brecht's instructions to his actors and one aspect of relating 'theory' and 'practice' in politics: if you adopt a Stanislavskian attitude to politics, you throw yourself into the part, become 'committed', with all the 'right' and necessary emotions, passion, anger, and eventually hatred; that kind of spontaneity is real dramatic—but you may be playing the wrong script: think of *Measures Taken*. If on the other hand you remain detached, analytical, a spectator, then the nearest you'll get to political action is to write a few books of theory, all very useful, but without any direct point of purchase on political power—think of *Galileo*. You can't solve that dilemma simply by having it both ways or oscillating between the two, but you can treat everything you do, both action and theory, as provisional, as part of a script that can be re-written at any moment, a play in the making—think of the epilogue to *Good Person of Setsuan*: 'you write the happy ending to the play'. That kind of 'provisional' attitude can even be maintained in relation to your own emotions, your own political anger—Brecht got close to expressing that in 'To Posterity':

> For we knew only too well:
> even the hatred of squalor
> makes the brow grow stern,

even anger against injustice
makes the voice grow harsh.
Alas, we who wished to lay
the foundations for kindness
could not ourselves be kind.

OK, I'm getting away from reading, I know. But I'm trying to indicate why I think Chris's dilemmas arise from a pre-Brechtian attitude, so that I can point to a very different way of 'reading'. If you think about Brecht's practice in the theatre, there are at least three features of it that could perhaps be adapted to the practice of reading.

First, his work is always collaborative, collective, not just in the sense of working with a theatre-group, from scratch companies to the full Berliner Ensemble, in rehearsing and producing plays, but in the very process of writing itself: almost all his writing was done in collaboration with others, picking other people's brains, having an open-door policy while he was writing, always, if he could, working with a group around him as he wrote.

Second, he was constantly re-writing, revising, re-shaping, not just in the sense that every writer does—endless redrafts until there's a 'finished product'—but in a more radical sense of re-casting a script when it had outlived its usefulness, always regarding a version of a work as temporary, ready for this performance but not to be embalmed and fixed—think of what he did to *Threepenny Opera* when he wanted to make a film of it or when he wrote *The Threepenny Novel*. After Hiroshima he re-wrote *Galileo* and though he says 'we had to make only a few alterations—not a single one to the structure of the play', you get the impression that if structural changes had been needed, Brecht wouldn't have hesitated.

Third, Brecht's attitude to his own plays was also the attitude he had to 'the classics'—he would rewrite, adapt, re-shape, re-think the plays by other authors that he produced himself, not just in the now-familiar sense of giving the play an 'interpretation' or 'cutting'; Brecht would write his own scenes and insert them, change the role of characters entirely, give them completely new lines—look at his adaptations of Lenz's *The Tutor*, Segher's *Joan of Arc*, Moliere's *Don Juan*, Farquhar's *Trumpets and Drums*, or the process that went into his production of *Coriolanus*.

Now the point about all these aspects of his work is that they aren't things that just went on in his head, if only because they involved lots of other people: they were collective and material activities in a public world. With Brecht, you always get the sense that writing, that art, is a form of practical work, not a private agony over a blank sheet of paper—that's perhaps what partly explains his rate of production, the speed at which he produced stuff: look at Volker's *Brecht Chronicle*.

And in all this activity Brecht is *reading* a lot, researching his plays, looking at scripts, working through novels and classics for adaptation, keeping abreast of what's happening in literature generally, devouring books and manuscripts. But it's reading with an eye on *use*, a way of reading that treats texts the way a handyman treats bits of wood and odds and ends lying around the workshop, as raw material for his *bricolage*—to use that once fashionable Levi-Strauss term. Like the *bricoleur*, Brecht sees things from unexpected angles, finds uses for them they didn't have before, puts unexpected things together, in order to make another text, one that might have political edge in his own context, one that might help to change the theatre itself, and through that the audiences, and through them . . .

OK, what relevance can this have for our own kind of reading? Well, one thing is that most of us now read in solitude; we've become used to that notion of 'reading', and we actually think of most 'literary texts' in terms of private, solitary consumption, even though many of them weren't

even designed that way—not even the great nineteenth-century novels: think of them being read out in the family or other gatherings, or, more generally, think of the public status given them by serialisation—a sense of large numbers of people reading each issue, each part-number, at the same time and discussing them; think of Dickens's public readings. And obviously a great deal of poetry, from Homer to Chaucer, was meant for public recitation, just as a lot of lyric poetry was meant to be sung in public or in a group—think of the context of troubadour love-songs. I suppose the nearest we get nowadays to that sense of a 'public' status for literature is in the serialisation of Dickens, Hardy, Trollope on TV, or at large rock-concerts, or, of course, in the theatre. But even in the case of plays the way we 'study' them tends to be by reading them, each of us individually.

And literature generally has become something we 'study', at school or in universities; there's a long history behind that, but perhaps it's time we began to change that history a bit, to re-write the practice of reading and studying literature as more or less solitary individuals. I'm not sure it's possible to break that habit, or even to erode it—though you find something of what I'm after in writing workshops, or in the editorial meetings of small literary magazines; you also find it most obviously in oppositional theatre-groups, collectively creating a show.

But can we introduce something of that into the everyday reading of literature, particularly in the 'study' of literature in education —particularly when the whole of education is still shaped by individual written performance, in competitive exams? Of course, there's some sense of collective, collaborative 'reading' when a text is discussed in a seminar or super-vision, but mainly that takes the form of comparing our individual 'readings', rather than using the text, collectively, to launch off from, find uses for, unexpected angles on, so that we can produce our own texts, do our own work.

I'll give you an example of the kind of collective and unexpected *bricolage* that can happen. Our theatre-group was thinking of doing a production of *Coriolanus*, so we started by having a close look at Brecht's 'Study' of the first scene and rewriting it, playing around with it. Then someone pointed out that the 'Study' had been written sometime around 1953, the year of the workers' rising in Berlin. And that led us to Gunter Grass's play, *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising*, about Brecht rehearsing *Coriolanus* during the rising. But then someone else decided to investigate the political context of Grass's work, in Germany from '64 to '66, and found out that Grass had made over fifty speeches for Willy Brandt during the 1965 general election in West Germany—and that the money raised by those speeches was spent in providing five libraries for the West German Army (and one for conscientious objectors!), in order to help 'change the German Army into a civilised army'. And that led us on to the problem of how you could 'civilise' an army—which, after all, isn't that far from the problems explored in *Coriolanus*—so we ended up offering to do a show at our own local army barracks, and we re-wrote *Coriolanus* for that audience. We wanted to take the show to Northern Ireland after that, but it didn't work out.

Or take 'The Dedication' itself. I was interested by Chris's quoting that note from 'The Printers to the Reader', in which the 'Printers' clearly interpret the dedication as claiming divine inspiration for *The Temple*. Now, in fact that note was almost certainly written by Nicholas Ferrar, not the printers—just as, incidentally, that 'sweet youth' was someone definite, Herbert's brother, Henry. But have you ever thought about the actual printers of *The Temple*? Their names are on the title-page of the first edition: Thomas Buck and Roger Daniel, printers to the University of Cambridge. Buck was one of the licensed printers in Cambridge from 1625 to about 1640, then his name disappears from the imprint and Daniel's appears by itself for a while. Daniel was in some kind of trouble with Parliament in 1642 and finally had his patent cancelled in 1650—at which point Buck's name reappears for a year or

so. Then in 1653 the London Stationers' Company, who'd been in a long struggle with Cambridge about the Stationers' monopoly being broken, more or less bought out the Cambridge printers and put a man of their own called Legate into the Cambridge print-shop as their agent. Cambridge cancelled Legate's licence in 1655 and appointed John Field instead, who had been printer to Parliament back in 1649—and the same year, 1655, Cromwell gave Field the monopoly on printing Bibles, together with Henry Hills, who'd been a Leveller in 1648 and was also an official printer to the House of Commons, along with Giles Calvert and Thomas Brewster—and both those two were still going after the Restoration: they were both imprisoned in the early 1660s, and Calvert's wife had a secret press seized as late as 1667 . .

I could go on, but you get the point: the story of the printers in that period is fascinating, with a commercial monopoly battle going on between London and Cambridge and a political struggle going on over control of printing in general. Now, I'm not sure what *use* anyone could make of 'The Dedication' itself, but it'd be fascinating to find out what happened to Buck and Daniel, and Calvert and Field, and Hills and Brewster, during the Civil War and after, so as to write, say, a play about the conflicts in the printing trade then and compare them with the conflicts in the printing industry today—the politics of control over the media and all that. If we did that we might learn something use full.

Pretty obviously, I recognise, all this hasn't got much to do with what we normally mean by 'reading literature', but I'm suggesting that if you read with an eye to the *use* you can make of a text, all sorts of things turn up, and you find yourself trying to re-work the text in ways that actually teach you a lot more, in the end, than you would have got from 'reading' it the way Chris has—or, still more, than the normal kind of 'close reading'.

I suppose what I'm after could be called really practical criticism! But I do think that if you believe that 'literature' is important, you can't just stick to criticism; you have to be

able to cash that belief in action, and that means trying to make texts, make 'literature', write, use texts, in ways that actually connect to things that are important now. Otherwise you're back with Dai's Romantics, looking for private feelings, and then you get hang-ups about your private 'self'. So I want to rewrite Proust:

> reading can stimulate us to action when a certain kind of laziness or frivolity prevents us from engaging spontaneously with the complex political issues that are the true life of the society.

If we could regard reading in that way, then perhaps we could find a post-Proustian, even post-Brechtian way of regarding 'literature'.

Certainly at the very least we need less reverence for the text, less of a fetishistic attitude: let's re-write them, kick 'em around, see where they lead us, see what real use we can make of them in the public world, and that means, for me, within the political struggle. If we don't do that, then 'reading literature' is going to become more and more an empty activity, a mere private ritual, devoid of any real connection, a 'purely mental state'. About twenty years before Herbert was born, you can see a parallel to some of the problems we've now got about 'literature' in relation, then, to 'prayer'. Remember the *Second Admonition to Parliament* in 1572, against the revised *Book of Common Prayer*:

> The Book is such a piece of work as it is strange we will use it, besides I cannot account it praying, as they use it commonly, but only reading or saying of prayers, even as a child that learned to read, if his lessons be a prayer, he doth not pray, even so it is commonly a saying, and reading prayers and not praying. . . For though they have many guises, now to kneel, and now to stand, these

be matters of course, and not any prick of conscience, or piercing of the heart.

The Puritans didn't try to rectify matters by fervently activating their psyches while they mouthed the words of the *Prayer Book*. They turned to preaching, wrote their own prayers, spoke in tongues, discovered their own voices—and made a revolution, the only one we've had in this country! Herbert's whole project in *The Temple* makes some kind of sense if you put it back into that general context, as a rather liberal-conservative response to those ideological and political struggles of that revolutionary period; but what we need now isn't to spend hours trying to understand the logical intricacies of his 'Dedication'. What we need is real practical dedication to participation in our own revolutionary period, in our own ideological and political struggles, and if 'reading literature' can't be part of that, then it's just a way of being 'lazy and frivolous'.

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GEORGE: Unfortunately, Phil, you've just spoiled what might have been an interesting case by falling into rhetoric, and rhetoric slides over problems, makes things just that bit too easy. You want us to dedicate ourselves, and somehow our reading, our really practical criticism as you call it, to the class struggle—you didn't actually say 'class-struggle', but I presume I'm right in thinking that that's what you meant. But what you seem to presume is that somehow we'll end up on the right side, your side, in that 'struggle'. And you obviously presume that you're on the right side already. But isn't that the real difficulty with the kind of activism you're actually advocating: that it turns into a rather blind kind of voluntarism: take the leap and you're there.

Dai was talking about the conceptual problems of affirming specifically religious belief—well, your notion of political dedication reminds me of Kierkegaard's leap into faith. You seem to have forgotten your own comments about perhaps playing the wrong script, and the basic reason why you can talk about 'provisionality' one moment and apparently forget it the next is because you see 'political struggle' as, in the end, external to you, as something that happens elsewhere and that you have to join, dedicate yourself to.

Yes, I'm being somewhat unfair, but all I'm doing is highlighting something that seemed to me to be subtly present in everything you've said about 'using' texts. On the other hand, what you said about the ideology of the self struck me as potentially very important, because it introduces a dimension that 'reading literature' can be relevant to.

Let me put it in terms of some of the things you mentioned yourself. You talked about the Puritans making the only revolution we've had in this country. That statement would have to be qualified in all sorts of ways, but even if it was a revolution, we know that it was an incredibly complex period to live through. By that I don't just mean that it's not very easy to see it, then or now, cleanly as a 'class-struggle', or that the causes of the whole thing were immensely ramified, but rather that many of the people involved in what we used to call 'Puritanism' were very much preoccupied with their 'selves', or their 'souls', and they've left us records, diaries, autobiographies, tracts, sermons, which are above all concerned with the trials and tribulations of personal conversion, all the stages of awareness of sin, repentance, illumination, relapse, affirmation.

The seventeenth-century civil war was fought out not just on battlefields or in the Putney Debates but also in men's 'souls'. One of the great metaphors of the time for spiritual, inner, conflict was 'civil war', and, as you said yourself, metaphors for thinking are important. That turmoil

in the self, that self-division, that inner struggle, is something you seem to want to slide over. Even in your account of *Hamlet*, you turn Hamlet's play-acting into a pure device, even though you recognised yourself that play-acting can bring you close to a real kind of madness: isn't Stanislavsky's pupil in a state a bit like Hamlet's?

You want us to get away from the writer's privatised agonies before the blank page, but you seem to think that political action doesn't, or shouldn't, have its own peculiar agonies! Yes, I'm slipping into rhetoric myself. But both your activists and theorists, your political Stanislavskians and political spectators, tend to forget about the subjective dimension of politics, that process of conversion, of real change at a very deep level that's required in any kind of 'political commitment'. In fact, there's now a species of theoretical voluntarism around which by-passes this whole problem, even more perhaps than the old-style activist voluntarism. I'll give you an example from a new journal I was reading recently; it's very sophisticated and very intelligent—a 'marxist journal in the theory and practice of psychology, psychoanalysis, linguistics, semiotics'. But in an article on 'Fetishism and Ideology' you get this kind of argument:

> What is at stake in the displacement of an 'ideology' by a 'science' is not a movement of knowledge closer to a hidden reality, but a shift between two systems of concepts, implicated in different practices and with different effects. Thus the 'relations of production' are not existents in the real producing a set of phenomenal forms given to knowledge in the form of ideology, they are concepts, produced in a determinate discourse with a particular history, with its own conditions of existence, implicated in particular practices and exercising particular effects. The distance between 'ideology' and 'science', between 'phenomenal forms' and 'real relations', is not a distance between two realities, nor a distance between concepts and reality, but a distance

> between two discourses, and a distance between the political effects of these discourses.

The author may well be right—but how does that 'displacement' occur? I don't just mean 'how does the science displace the ideology?' I mean how did she, the author of the article, move from one to the other, and why? Because if 'the distance' between 'ideology' and 'science' is simply a 'distance between two discourses, and a distance between the political effects of these discourses', how does anyone *cross* that distance, and how does anyone *decide* which of the two 'discourses' and their respective 'political effects' is to be preferred?

You can't get out of that problem by attributing an impersonal status to 'discourse', as is sometimes done, if you want to continue to talk about 'Marxists' (as the article does) or about being a 'Marxist journal'. If being a marxist or being a marxist journal means anything, it means having chosen, in some sense, to cross that 'distance'—and 'science' is clearly being used by the author to mean, or include, whatever she means by 'marxism'. How, concretely and intellectually, does that 'crossing' occur?

I know it's not an easy problem, and I'm putting it in a very *simpliste* way, but only because it's a problem that is too easily shrugged off or theorised away. Think what's happened in the last decade's debate about Marx's own so-called 'epistemological break'. For a while, there was a sustained argument about when, if at all, the 'break' occurred, the break-out from 'ideology' and into 'science', and we had a few attempts to explain why the break occurred, if it did, when it did—but those explanations didn't get much beyond the old reliance on the conjuncture of 'the three sources of marxism' plus a dose of class-allegiance. And what we ended up with, after the 'break', was a self-justifying theory anyway, a theoretical practice that justified its own premises! After that, it was inevitable that we'd spend the next decade arguing about epistemology.

Yes, I said 'we' because I suppose I, too, can't escape the argument, though it bores me stiff. And the reason why it bores me is because it's now infected almost every kind of political debate among marxists, at least among the 'theorists', while making them incapable of talking to anyone who doesn't talk about psychoanalysis, semiotics and epistemology. More important, because it points to a basic sleight-of-mind among today's marxists. It always seems, at least from the way they write, as if they've *already* crossed that 'distance', while 'ideological discourse' is always spoken, or more likely written, by somebody else—only too frequently by other self-proclaimed marxists they don't agree with. But that reduces 'ideology', like politics, to something external, something out there.

One of the things I liked about that article, I must admit, is that it didn't see Marx himself as having escaped, at any point, into the clear light of scientific coherence. It very usefully analysed how '*Capital* is a text which is deeply fissured and multiply fragmented'. But if *Capital* itself is deeply fissured and multiply fragmented, mightn't it be possible that 'being a marxist' is always also a matter of being deeply fissured and multiply fragmented, and that's where a crucial part of the political significance of 'marxism' lies today?

I'll put that less metaphorically. If 'ideology' has any real use as a political concept, and if being a marxist has anything to do with politics (which one can occasionally doubt these days), then the break from ideology to marxism can't be just an epistemological break. And if it's to be a political 'break', then it's going to be a very jaggèd one indeed, because 'politics', in my book at least, isn't just a matter of joining a political party, or taking part in industrial struggle, or writing theoretical articles, or supporting (critically) the armed struggle in whatever country you think appropriate. It's also, and dominantly, a matter of *how* you do those things, and many others, and that question of 'how' may even prevent you, or save you, from doing some of them.

Think of the effect that the women's movement has had, or perhaps had briefly, or perhaps should one day have, on what's meant by 'politics'. Since everything I do, from getting on a bus to going to a disco, from going to work to going to bed, can and normally does involve some kind of contact or relationship between men and women, everything I do has become, in principle and in the details of everyday living, politicised. The women's movement, whatever the theoretical and strategic problems of its relation to more 'traditional' political issues and perspectives, is clearly of enormous political significance if only because it brings politics into the heartland of the self. It's re-emphasised that everything we do is intimately political.

A few years ago, all sorts of bad analogies were being offered between women's liberation and black liberation. I think that in one respect at least they're very similar: that everything a white does in a society where whites dominate blacks is political, every contact between white and black in America or South Africa or Britain has a political dimension. If the term 'ideology' doesn't include those constellations of feelings, attitudes, everyday responses, modes of thought, habits of action and reaction, that we can talk of in terms of 'white supremacy' or 'male supremacy', 'racism' or 'male chauvinism', then 'ideology' has become a very shallow and abstract term.

Perhaps the term itself doesn't matter, though I'd like to think that 'ideology' can still carry that depth of meaning, instead of referring increasingly to what people 'think'. Because if we're going to talk still about 'bourgeois ideology' or 'capitalist ideology', then those terms have got to have the same full sense that the terms 'bourgeois' and 'capitalist' themselves have: a whole historical epoch, in all its subtle ramifications, is summed up in those terms in Marx. Yes, I know that all this is very familiar and that the problems of analysis start there, but I'm trying to redress a balance.

You see, if you don't use 'ideology' with that kind of weight, your 'analyses' can get very remote or seem to most people to be very remote (and that's a crucial problem) from

the day-to-day problems of living in a capitalist society. It's an old story that Lenin could analyse the economic problems of Czarist Russia starting from a glass of water on a peasant's table. Well, you can still analyse the economic problems of late international monopoly capitalism starting from what's on the table for a decent 'English' breakfast. But if you try to analyse the ideological and political problems of Northern Ireland starting from a pair of rosary beads in a Provo's pocket, you'll soon realise what's involved in 'ideology'. That's the kind of depth and real complexity I mean when I talk about ideology—and the obverse of that is what we mean by 'revolution'. Trotsky had the right idea when he wrote those articles in *Pravda* in 1923-24 on 'The Problems of Everyday Life', about politeness, drinking, swearing, how to address comrades, how to use libraries, and the rest. But that kind of analysis isn't being produced by our home-grown marxists any more. Is it any wonder they spend so much time talking only to each other! Yes, I'm off the point again, but you get my general point. I'll try and come back to literature and reading.

Well, all this was really sparked off by two things: Phil's leap into 'practical' criticism and—this may surprise you—a comment early on that Chris's question 'Can I class myself?' was a daft question. Well, I know Chris didn't mean it that way, but for me it has overtones of the political problem of 'class' and class-allegiance. Remember what I said about the way 'class-allegiance' is introduced, somehow or other, into accounts of how Marx 'broke' with his own early 'bourgeois humanism', or 'Hegelianism', or 'historicism' or whatever you want to call it? Connect that with what I also said about the Puritans and their preoccupation with 'conversion'. One of the most intractable problems in historical analysis of that whole period is just who was a 'Puritan' and what it meant, and if we can't sort that out now I doubt if it was any easier at the time.

Incidentally, it still seems to me that it's the historians, not the epistemologists, who have given us the richest, and in the end clearest, accounts of what 'ideology' really

amounts to. You could argue that a decent novelist or certain kinds of playwright can do the same, insofar as they operate a bit like historians. I'm thinking of, say, Caryl Churchill's play about the seventeenth-century, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, with its real sense of the complexity of living *through* those years from 1640 to 1660, or, for a later epoch, the way in which David Hare's play for Joint Stock, *Fanshen*, based on Hinton's book about one typical village in China from 1946 to 1949, gives some sense of what political conversion means: to 'fanshen' is to be converted, to 'turn the world upside down' as the Levellers called it.

But the problem with such plays, and with historical works, and, in the end, with 'realist' fiction, is that they allow us to remain spectators of other people's changes. In fact, I think a whole case against 'realism', or at least against certain ways of reading realist fiction, could be based on that spectatorial attitude it invites in the reader. LN, you half-alluded to that attitude, I think, when you said of *Middlemarch* that we tend to 'over-hear' what the text says while we in some way visualise what it describes. Well, I'm not sure I do 'visualise' in any precise sense, but I know what you mean.

Basically, realist writing can put you in the same position as a play or a work of history does: you're 'looking at' events from a spectator's position. That poem of Ralegh's Phil just quoted includes the lines 'Heaven the judicious sharp spectator is / That sits and marks still who doth act amisse'. Well, the great virtue of good realist works, and why Marx valued Balzac, and Lenin valued Tolstoy, is that basically they offer us a kind of historical understanding, perhaps the kind of intimate history the historian normally can't write because he hasn't got the documentation. (Henry James said of Balzac that 'since history proceeds by documents he constructed, as he needed them, the documents too'.) But then, as readers, we can simply sit back and mark 'who doth act amisse'. The problem with realism isn't that the author is God but that he takes the reader up into heaven with him! Sorry, I'm riding another hobby-horse. I'll steer back again to class and reading, via history and Marx.

One of the things that is most difficult to grasp about *Capital* is the relationship between the 'history' and the 'argument' in it, or, if you like, the empirical evidence and the movement of the theoretical analysis. Because in the end Marx isn't offering us a history we can 'watch', partly because history in his sense can't in any way be visualised, and the reason why it can't is because what is crucial in history, for Marx, is a kind of 'logic' at work in it. I think that problem is at the core of those various metaphors in *Capital* about the 'appearance' and the 'essence', the 'phenomenal forms' and the 'real movements'.

Quite often, 'ideology' is linked, in interpretations of Marx, with the 'appearance' or the 'phenomenal forms', as if what it was contrasted with was 'the real', so that the 'break' from ideology becomes a matter of grasping the 'real' movement 'behind' the appearances. In one sense, that's true, I suppose — that the 'real explanation', the correct explanation, of the relationship between capitalist-employer and wage-labourer is that the wage-relationship is an *unequal exchange* in which surplus-value is generated by the worker's labour-power but appropriated by the capitalist—that, crudely, is what 'really happens'. And, certainly, one can't *see* that happening, though one can grasp it conceptually, as a kind of logic, as an argument. It's then too easy, too simple, to say that 'ideology' is generated by what we *can* 'see happening'—and by lining up 'ideology' with 'appearance' one can get close to adopting that position, particularly when 'ideology' is further linked with 'empiricism' as a merely 'perceptual' account of 'knowledge'.

All sorts of wires get crossed at this point and it's very hard to disentangle them. But put it this way: the 'logic' that Marx discloses in history isn't, in the end, a conceptual logic, because the major premise of his syllogism isn't a proposition: it's a distribution of power. You can work out the logic of the exchange-relation involved in the wage-contract, and at that level it seems extremely easy to change it, to recognise how fundamentally un-necessary 'the capitalist' is, or, if you like, the capitalist class.

But, of course, it's far from easy to change it in practice, not just because coercive power, the state apparatus or whatever, is ranked on the side of the capitalist, but because of the grip of 'ideology', and what that means, in the end, is that 'ideology' too has the same structure: *ideology too has a syllogistic logic, the basic premise of which is a distribution of power*.

We need some way of really thinking that meshing of power and logic, if only to avoid two apparently opposite tendencies in thinking about 'capitalism', 'politics' and 'revolution'. The first is the belief that since capitalism is 'inherently contradictory' it will work out its own necessary destruction. That belief takes a thousand-and-one forms, from 'economism' to apocalypticism, but basically it's derived from a reliance on the 'logical' structure of Marx's analysis, from which one can indeed show the necessarily declining rate of profit or the increasing immiseration of the (Third World) proletariat. The second is the belief that what's crucial to political revolution is that people should see the 'contradictions', should understand the way in which they're exploited, and again that takes a multitude of forms, from the old debates about 'actual' and 'potential' class-consciousness to the latest varieties of vanguardism, since at the heart of vanguardism is a notion of 'taking power', in the sense of an attack on the centres of power, of State power. (That it's now not easy to locate the power to be 'taken' is a characteristic strategic problem of this perspective.) But for that you need specific people (the Party) prepared to do it, and their 'preparedness' is fundamentally a matter of 'revolutionary consciousness'.

Both these perspectives tend to rely for their coherence on, at some point or other, the notion of 'class-struggle', which is why I'm intrigued by that question: 'can I class myself? ' On the first perspective, 'classes' are necessarily in conflict insofar as capitalism is logically self-contradictory, or, in another version, the very existence of 'classes', of capitalist relations of production, is logically in conflict with the development of the material forces of production, so that necessarily the maintenance of the one is at the expense

of the other. Again, you can find more or less sophisticated variants of those two arguments but both of them rest in the end on a notion of 'class' in which, fundamentally, '*I am classed* ', the operation of 'classing' is performed by 'objective' factors. My position *vis-à-vis* the relations of production is not a matter of choice: we are all bearers of pre-determined class-positions. We may, by birth or otherwise, 'enter into' those positions but it's the positions we bear not the 'bearers' that are the motor of history.

On the second perspective, the question of whether I can *class myself* seems to make a certain amount of sense, since if what's needed is the right kind of consciousness, the right kind of 'participation' in the 'class-struggle', then I can (I have to, therefore must be able to) change my (class)-consciousness, align myself correctly with the right line in the class-struggle, take the right decisions, make the right moves—even if the 'I' here is subordinate to a collective decision. That's why vanguardism is so often allied with a rather curious kind of moralism, with accusations of deviationism, class-treachery, or just simple 'lack of dedication' and the need for 're-education'. That accusation is often formulated in terms of 'objective' factors or positions or effects, but it is so often the 'subjective' factor that is actually blamed. Yes, comrade, I'm deviating from the point again. But I'm not really. I'm getting there slowly—it was literature we were talking about?

Well, let's take the traditional problem of the relationship between 'ideology' and 'literature'. I said earlier that 'ideology', like the capitalist social formation itself, has a 'logic' the major premise of which isn't a proposition but a distribution of power.

Here's a simple example of that kind of enmeshing of logic and power: a Zen Master brandishes a large stick over a pupil's head and says: 'If you say this stick is real, I'll strike you with it. If you say this stick is not real, I'll strike you with it. If you say nothing at all, I'll strike you with it. '

Well, if you try to work that out as a problem of logic you'll be there for ever. The only 'answer' is to take the stick out of the Master's hand (though you don't need to hit him with it, necessarily). That's perhaps easy enough to recognise when it's written down—it may even be fairly easy to grasp when the actual stick is being waved over your head. But what happens when the Master sets an exam-paper in which it states: 'If you say this examination is real I shall fail you. If you say this examination is not real I shall fail you. If you say nothing I shall fail you'? Does the pupil tear up the exam paper? Of course, he could write about something entirely different, but the point is, finally, that the problem is only a problem because of the power of the Master over the pupil, to hit him or to 'fail' him.

Gregory Bateson discusses the stick example in his account of the 'Double Bind', in order to explain what happens in a family which drives a child to schizophrenia. A double-bind has, for Bateson, a number of features: two or more people, one of whom is the victim; a 'primary negative injunction' ('don't do X or I'll punish you', or 'if you don't do X I'll punish you'); a 'secondary injunction conflicting with the first at a more abstract level' (often communicated to the victim not by an explicit statement but by non-verbal means —posture, gesture, tone of voice); and a 'tertiary injunction' prohibiting the victim from escaping from the field covered by the other two injunctions.

'Ideology', it seems to me, has the structure of a double-bind, and that 'tertiary injunction' is where the 'distribution of power' premise is principally located, but not only in terms of someone else's power to prevent you from leaving the field. The reason you're trapped in a double-bind may quite often be because your *own* power is located within that field: to leave it would be to lose whatever power you yourself have.

Obviously, this basic structure may have a number of variations: there may be more than one double-bind imposed on the same victim, all the injunctions may be more or less explicit, the primary injunction may come from one

source, the secondary from another, *et cetera*. In all these cases, what you may have, abstractly, is a formal paradox or a logical contradiction, but what that means in practice, for the victim, is an insoluble dilemma, a self-contradiction. In some cases, you could say that the victim 'needn't' accept or obey the conflicting injunctions, but if the field of the double-bind is also the field which constitutes the very 'identity' of the victim, then 'leaving' the field means wrenching that 'identity'—which is why the family is such a paradigm of the field of the double-bind.

Bateson also makes the point that the double-bind has to be a repeated experience, a 'recurrent theme' in the life of the victim, rather than a single traumatic event, but that when repetition has created an habitual expectation of double-bind any one element in the set of ingredients can be enough to 'precipitate panic or rage', or, presumably, apathy or catatonia. I'd like to develop the notion that capitalism is itself constituted as a double-bind, but I don't think I'll risk it. I am fairly confident, though, that a great deal of what's commonly meant by 'ideology' in the day-to-day politics of experience, of 'commonsense', can be analysed in terms of a double-bind structure—racism, male chauvinism, Parliamentarian-ism, 'a fair day's pay for a fair day's work', *et cetera*.

And the point about at least some of these is that the 'victim' puts himself into a double-bind insofar as he won't leave the field of contradictory injunctions because he will lose his own power. The reason why I remain a male chauvinist (despite all the arguments) is that I would actually 'lose' a great deal of power, real economic, sexual, domestic, political power over women (what little I have) if I 'gave up' being a male chauvinist. The reason why most whites are, in the end, racist is because they won't give up the power of being 'white'—and that's not just tautologous (though the ultimate sticking-point in any ideological argument is normally a tautology) because 'to be white' means, in this world, now, to have the power, the privilege, that comes from being white.

One can explain *why* it means that, historically, why that 'equation' holds in the actual world now and why it no longer holds quite as firmly as it once did, but one can't finally explain racism as an *illusion* about the real world. Racism rests on a partial perception and at an extreme sees the whole world in terms of the power that is at stake in that 'field', but that's precisely because it's the only 'power' which is at stake for many whites: they haven't got much power in any other field, basically because most people don't have much power over their very survival, their means of life, of employment, the very forces of production which enable them to live. But what power they do have, they hold on to—and that includes, in this country, the power of simply being in the 'affluent' one-fifth of the globe.

Sorry, as usual I'm getting side-tracked, and I'm cutting comers in the process. But let me just make three points, or rather suggestions, and then I'll get back to literature.

Very briefly, the relationship between ideology and the 'real world' isn't to be mapped on the model of 'two discourses' one of which is concerned with appearance and the other with reality, or one of which is epistemologically more valid than the other. Ideological discourse has the same *kind* of relation to the real world as the phrase 'leg of a chair' has to the leg of a chair. To call a chair-leg a 'leg' isn't a metaphor or simply an analogue. Though we can find other ways of describing what a chair-leg does, how it works, what it was made of, what its purpose is, etc., 'leg' is the only term we have for it, and the reason we call it a 'leg' is because we've made it in our own image, made it a leg in the first place. For it to be anything else we'd have to change the whole construction of chairs, and of ourselves too if we were actually to sit in those reconstructed chairs—though of course you can always tinker with the design of chairs and you can even now sit on the floor. (We're having rather similar problems with terms like 'chair-man' at the moment, for not dissimilar reasons.)

Second, as I indicated earlier, 'ideology' has to take the weight of a whole historical epoch, a whole mode of life, and that's partly because 'power', though crucially concentrated, is also dispersed. There are different kinds as well as levels of power at work in capitalist society and it's the relationship between those kinds as well as levels that is intractably difficult, even though the basic power remains what it always was: the power over survival itself, the very material conditions of existence. That basic material power was once the control over (possession of, ownership of) land and it still is to a large extent, globally, but increasingly the power over survival is located in the power over other forces of material production—'survival' can in this context be a relative term, while remaining, in the final analysis, an absolute.

Third, to 'take power' can't be simply a matter of taking if 'ideology' in the sense of a double-bind rooted in one's own retention of power is at work. Taking power has also got to mean, in many cases, eroding one's *own* power, or, better, changing the nature of one's relation to the control of power, so that power *can't* be something you can keep for yourself. OK, OK, I began by accusing Phil of rhetoric! I'll take back that third, rhetorical suggestion—and offer you literature instead.

A work of literature can sometimes present or explore the double-binds I have in mind. Remember the scene based on the Putney Debates in that Caryl Churchill play I mentioned—where the Levellers are trapped, finally, not only by the contradictory 'injunctions' they are offered by Cromwell, Ireton, and God (through the Bible), operating in conjunction, nor simply by their own logical tangles about 'the people', 'property' and 'birth-right', but also by accepting, literally, the terms of the debate in the first place. And the reason for their acceptance of a 'Debate' (negotiations) rather than a military conflict, at that stage, was not only because they might well have lost the battle but because the Levellers and Agitators also needed, like

Cromwell, a united Army to maintain the security of their own position in the first place.

That moment in 1647 really is a classic 'revolutionary' moment, but there were just too many real and intertwined double-birds to negotiate, including, as always, the real loss of power by the revolutionaries themselves if they risked going further. (It's interesting that Milton's most profound insight into the 'Fall' concerns the real risk that Adam had to take to maintain his love of Eve—and that risk could only be a genuine one, against God, if he lost—but that's another story.)

A novelist, too, can sometimes present us with just such an analysis of the roots of 'ideology', as I think John Berger does in his description of Umberto in *G*:

> What Umberto calls madness is what threatens him. Not what threatens him personally—another merchant, a thief, the man who will cuckold him—but what threatens the social structure in which he lives as a privileged being.
>
> His privilege is more important to him than his life, not because he could not survive without his American mistress, four servants at home, a fountain in his garden, hand-made silk shirts, or his wife's dinner-parties, but because implicit in his privilege are the values and judgements by which he must make sense of his lived life. All values stem from his belief—that his privileges are deserved.
>
> Yet the sense he makes of his life does not satisfy him. Why must liberty, he asks himself, always be retrospective, a quality already won and controlled? Why is there no liberty to pursue now?

> Umberto terms madness that which threatens the social structure guaranteeing his privileges. I teppisti are the final embodiment of madness. Yet madness also represents freedom from the social structure which hems him in. And so he arrives at the conclusion that limited madness may grant him greater liberty within the structure.
>
> He calls Laura mad in the hope that she will bring into his life a modicum of liberty.

That's an extra-ordinary perception of both the basis and the self-contradictions of ('petty-bourgeois'?) ideology, and, more generally, of the inevitably instrumental view of others that arises from any special pleading for oneself. But Berger—as is his aim—distances the reader from it, so that he or she can recognise it, analyse it as the text itself does: the gaps between the printed paragraphs hold you back for that pondered recognition. You were asking for a Brechtian way of reading, Phil,—you might do worse than start from an analysis of how *G* positions its reader.

But—to get finally to the point—what I want to establish is a different *kind* of connection between 'ideology' and 'literature', perhaps a complementary one to the Brechtian notions you were groping after, rather than a 'better' one, still less the 'only correct' one: there's no competitive ranking of approaches as far as I'm concerned.

I can suggest the kind of connection I have in mind briefly, by going right back to Chris's paper. Surprised? Well, what it seemed to me that Chris was actually doing was uncovering *the logic of the double-binds* of 'religious ideology', not just in George Herbert but perhaps in the Christian religion generally—precisely as a 'logical structure the basic premise of which is a distribution of power'. I don't think, Chris, you used the term 'double-bind' but your analysis of the problems of trying to occupy both positions, being schizophrenically both addressee and addresser

simultaneously, led you precisely into some of the classic problems of Christian theology—the omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence of God, inspiration, belief, salvation, etc.—and the way you analysed them wasn't as theoretical issues, as 'theology', but precisely as someone caught in a double-bind, twisting and turning to get out of an insoluble dilemma.

Like Beckett's reader playing chess against himself when the rules have gone crazy, I found your performance ludicrously funny at times. But I can see what you were trying to do, I think. A lot of the elements in your analysis could have been arrived at in a quite different way, by simply pointing to or explicating the 'meaning' of the lines and 'explaining' what Herbert 'believed'. But to *try actually to mean* such 'beliefs' yourself, to try to apply the claim that one was 'inspired' to yourself, led you into the ideology of the text in a way that allowed you to disclose its structure as a series of double-binds, not just a set of historical 'beliefs'. Indeed, if you try to gain 'knowledge' of seventeenth-century religious belief by analysing what phrases like 'for from thee they came' mean, you won't get very far, but by trying to actually say them yourself and make rational sense out of them as something you said (in a different way, incidentally, from the way Della Volpe recommends) you ended up in the same dilemmas that underpin Herbert's beliefs, even if Herbert himself mightn't have recognised them as dilemmas.

Partly because yours was an exercise in 'bad faith', in lying to yourself, rather than an expression of 'faith', you were able to uncover the logical structure of those beliefs. But then the crucial difference between you and Herbert, or between bad faith and faith, was that whereas you were only caught in the *logic* of the beliefs, the actual believer is caught in an enmeshing of *logic and 'power'* together. I mean that the basic 'premise' of religious belief is that the conditions of our very existence, not just of our survival, are under the power of someone else—'God'. It's our absolute contingency, the very fact of our existence, or anything's existence, that is the intractable dilemma at the core of

religious belief, and once that contingency operates as a premise—not just as a prepositional premise, but as the recognition, awareness, of ultimate powerlessness over the conditions of one's existence—then the logic of religious ideology can be generated.

That's why religious ideology is as difficult to 'break' as the ideology of the 'self': they both rest upon tautologies which seem necessary to any awareness at all—I can't be aware of anything without being aware of the 'I' as aware, and I can't be aware of that 'I' without being aware of its contingency; then you're straight back to René Descartes, and behind him the Scholastics. The only way to 'eradicate' that movement of thought is to remove the premise, but you can't remove absolute contingency in the sense that you can remove the sources of relative powerlessness, those distributions of power that operate in other fields as the premises for other ideological beliefs. Which is why the 'omnipotence' of God is central to religious belief. What you can perhaps do is to trace the shifts in ideological beliefs, because insofar as they have a 'logic' that logic can have an internal history, a working out of its own contradictions: if 'history' has a 'logic', it may be that what one can call 'ideo-logics' have a 'history' of their own.

What your analysis then suggests, Chris, is that a 'literary' text might incorporate, might be structured upon, a particular *stage* in the history of an 'ideologic' and that a reading of the 'logic' of a specific text may reveal the logic of that ideology, that ideo-logic, precisely because a reading isn't enmeshed in the power-premise that gives rise to the ideologic: when I read a text I'm not actually in the double-bind the text articulates, because I'm not in the situation of powerlessness relative to power that the ideologic derives from. Or if I am so enmeshed in 'real life', I'm not while I'm reading.

I think it was Dai who talked about the curious kind of *epoché*, of bracketing, that occurs as one reads. One aspect of that *epoché* is that to read is to 'enter into' a set of relations but they're not themselves relations of power. The text can't

compel me to read it, even though we speak of a 'compelling' book or even of the 'power' of literature. I am always free to stop reading, even though there may be 'compelling' reasons for me to read, as in an educational system, but these reasons lie outside the operation of the text itself; at most I might be forced to go through the motions of reading—as a lot of 'education' actually persuades people to do.

But if I'm right in suggesting that ideology is constituted by an enmeshing of power and logic, of a distribution of power and an ideologic which is generated from acceptance of that power, then it may be that a 'literary' text can re-work, re-construct, be structured by, or put into a kind of disarray, that 'ideologic'. A reader may then be able to grasp the structure of that ideologic, to see its contradictions in a way not normally accessible in the actual living of an ideological double-bind precisely because in the act of reading, the power-relation that supports the double-bind, that prevents one from 'leaving the field', is in abeyance.

Think of the Zen Master with the stick; it's easy to 'see through' the problem posed when it's merely a puzzle I can play with, but when it's a dilemma I have to resolve it's less easy to recognise it for what it is—a deflection from the real problem of power and authority that the puzzle serves to conceal.

Obversely, of course, one way of trying to 'escape' from a double-bind situation may be to 'escape' into writing: to put in abeyance the problem of power that fixes you in the double-bind, in order to work through, in the closed field of writing, a 'satisfactory' or acceptable resolution of the ideologic of that situation. It may be possible to trace that operation in at least some texts—unlike LN, I don't see why any particular method of analysis need apply to all texts. It may even be possible to explore the allure of 'being a writer' along similar lines: anyone whose identity is primarily constituted by the field of writing may be a full-time escapologist—which is not the same, necessarily, as being an escapist.

To explore those problems may be more important than trying to 'relate' a text to its historical moment, since the derangement of an ideologic achieved in a text may be prompted by a paradox of power specific to a historical moment, or even the specific dilemmas of an individual, but the text may experiment with the internal possibilities and permutations of an ideologic in ways that release it from the constraints of the actual double-bind operative at that (historical) moment.

Certainly, I think myself that Chris's analysis of the double-binds of religious ideology in 'The Dedication' got us much closer to the 'history' of the seventeenth century as it was lived through, at least in terms of the central problems of religious belief, than any study of Phil's Puritan printers ever would. But at the same time, and more interestingly, that way of reading uncovered some of the *continuing* problems of religious ideology—after all, religious belief is still enormously significant and its basic logical structure is unchanged, even though different contradictions or different facets within the ideologic may be dominant at different times.

I don't know whether that way of reading a text would be reading it 'as literature', but I suspect Chris was being put into a double-bind anyway by accepting the terms of the question in the first place. 'Can I class myself? ' isn't, in the end, a daft question. 'Can I read 'The Dedication' as a poem?' *is* a daft question.

*

BERT: 'Ave you finished then? Good God, at last! You know, Georgie, that was an unmitigated load of boring old crap. I haven't heard such ponderous inanities in a long time. 'Cutting comers' you called it! More like a slow-motion replay of a rained-off Test Match—every blessed ball bowled gently down the pitch, solemnly poked at for a long moment, then dismissed with infinite slowness into the

covers. Can't you *follow through* an idea, old George? Can't you bang just the occasional one to the boundary ? Won't you at least try to smash a few googlies for six? It'd wake us all up anyway!

Look, there were just three interesting ideas in all that lot, but you didn't really think your way through any of them. One is worth a detailed look—your point about the state of 'marxist' theory in this country at the moment. The second, your argument about power, needs sorting out if it's going to be useful for anything. The third, your comments on Chris's analysis of 'The Dedication', you didn't take far enough. Can I backtrack on each of these points and try to show you what I mean? No offence, lad? Just trying to help.

First then, theory. You're dead right about the political problems the present spate of theory runs into, particularly all the guff about epistemology. Going back to the poverty of even radical philosophy certainly isn't a particularly promising direction for English marxists to take right now. It *might* be if we were fighting an entrenched and influential philosophical idealism of a systematic kind, but in this country we're not, and you can't fight the kind of 'a-political' and 'a-theoretical' idealist 'common sense' that *is* a problem in this country by the superfine weapons of systematic philosophical criticism: your enemies don't read it and a lot of your allies can't. So how have we got into this position, with so much intellectual energy going into the sand? Let's try and answer that one first.

Remember, ten years ago, there was an influential theory around in England about the absence of theory in England—Perry Anderson's argument in his 'Components of the National Culture', that English 'culture' suffered from a double absence at its centre: we had no indigenous marxist theory and no classical sociology tradition, so we had no 'totalising' discipline of thought, unlike our friends, and enemies, in Germany, France, Italy. In all sorts of detailed respects, that was a shaky argument, and I'll come back to the most important ones in a minute. But the effect of its implicit recommendation and remedy was to lead a whole

generation of English Lefties on to a continental treck, in search of that elusive 'totalising' theory. One version of Anderson's essay—the one he gave to the old Tawney Group—ended with the proposal to set up a New Left publishing house; from 1970 onwards we had one. New Left Books, with a whole series of eagerly-read (or eagerly-bought) translations—it wasn't till 1975 that the first English author appeared in the NLB list, Anderson himself. Just think back on that decade, '68 to '78—you're all just about old enough aren't you?

It's a familiar point that anyone who relied on translations for their acquaintance with the European 'intellectual centre' (or even relied on what was translated to know what to bother to read in the original!), and tried to keep up with the translations, was, in effect, trying to assimilate fifty long years of theoretical argument in one jump. 'Theoretically', you can do it—if you're a student, unemployed, self-employed, or a non-teaching academic; you always have to somehow master a long tradition in a very short space of time anyway: that's partly what education and reading are all about! But the 'peculiarity' of the English situation during that decade was two-fold.

First, that the 'assimilation' was very uneven, in fact pretty random, even at the level of what was published, so that, for example, Althusser's *For Marx* was translated before Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness*, Levi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* long before Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, criticisms becoming available well before their targets were, and that whole upside-down pattern culminated, within a mere six years, in the whole process being pretty-near undercut by its own originating figure-heads almost before it had really taken root for a lot of people: Anderson's *Considerations on Western Marxism* and Althusser's *Essays in Self-Criticism*. By that time, of course, a new generation of translations was fluttering across the Channel: Lacan's *Ecrits* partially stammered into English in '77. Obviously, I'm over-simplifying, and I'll come back to this in a moment; but that flurry of topsy-turvy assimilation is as interesting a cultural

'moment' as the 'dominance' of a previous generation of 'émigrés' analysed in Anderson's '68 essay.

The second 'peculiarity of the English' was that, complementarily, there was a sense of a very sudden break from whatever did exist in England of an 'indigenous marxism'. If you want to talk about 'epistemological breaks', you might well think about that one. Symptomatic of it was the shunting to the side-lines of the work of, say, Raymond Williams and Edward Thompson. Even up to the late 'sixties, their work was part of the common debate on the Left; after about 1970 you could run across young English marxists who'd never actually got around to reading them, because they were too busy with the Balibars; it became a bit like talking to someone standing on the top rung of a ladder who didn't know there were forty rungs below him, still holding him up.

The political effect of both peculiarities has again been two-fold. First, to displace tactical and strategic considerations, at the level of 'theory', on to the problems of the European Communist Parties, which are in various ways both different from and, in crucial respects, politically *less* difficult than the problems of the British political scene. Basically, the problems of a working-class movement which has had its 'own' party as the official government for ten out of the last fourteen years and has had the power to bring down the 'only' alternative government, by barely shrugging its shoulders, in 1974, make the strategic problems of Eurocommunism etc. seem relatively minor by comparison—and I haven't even mentioned Northern Ireland.

Second, and complementarily, that continental drift in theory has helped to widen the 'gap' (or further widen it) between 'theory' and 'practice', or rather between the dominant concerns of current theory and the traditional problems of practice, for very much the reasons Anderson outlines in his *Considerations*: that 'Western Marxism' and its philosophical opponents are fighting on a displaced terrain, and not on the classic ground of marxist theory which is the

intersection of politics and economics, not the intersection of philosophy and culture. There has been a revival of 'socialist economics' in England recently, but that revival has been comparatively little influenced by most of the books on the *NLB* list, so far, still less by any injection of semiotics or psychoanalysis. But it's still the case that you can tot up on one hand the number of analyses of Britain's political and economic problems, of any theoretical or strategic weight, that have appeared from the British Left in the last ten years. *NLR*'s own track record at that level has been pretty unimpressive.

Now, given those general points, and given that your concern— and mine at the moment—is with the intersection of politics and culture, not directly with politics and economics or even economics and culture, the major problem is the 'epistemological break', in the sense I mentioned earlier: that quite deliberate effort on the part of a whole generation of young marxists to 'think European'. In itself, highly necessary, but we have to then get a bit clearer about both its origins and its pitfalls. So I want to go back first to Anderson's 'Components' argument, and then, second, to the randomness and unevenness of assimilation I mentioned earlier.

Anderson argued that English culture had an absent centre, lacked a totalising discipline of thought. But, he said, 'the displaced home of the totality became literary criticism', in the work of Dr. F. R. Leavis. Rightly, he said that this was quite extraordinary, compared with the European role and status of 'Lit. Crit.'. On one side of the Channel English philosophy, after Wittgenstein, 'abandoned ethics and metaphysics, for the neutral investigation of language', while English literary criticism, through Leavis, 'assumed the responsibilities of moral judgement and metaphysical assertion'. On the other side of the water, France had 'a highly technical, hermeneutic criticism (Poulet and Richard) and an ontological and moral philosophy (Sartre) '.

With the hindsight of ten years, one might say that what then happened in England, for a while, was that the neutral or technical 'investigation of language' derived from linguistics—after Saussure—combined with the 'highly technical' tradition of French literary criticism (really a form of *explication*)—after Roland Barthes—replaced Leavis and his tradition as the attempted totalising discipline. For a brief while, and still in some respects, semiotics attempted to become the 'centre'. On both sides of the water, it seemed, 'ontological' and 'moral' issues were effaced, with the slump in Sartre's status parallel to that in Leavis's. Once that implantation of Barthes into England had occurred, there was a relatively easy passage for the rest of the Sorbonne Circus, Althusser, Foucault, Lacan.

And it wasn't surprising that the first fields to be occupied by this French invasion were those with more or less direct affiliations to the traditions of Leavisite criticism: film-criticism in the early days of *Screen*, the early work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and, of course, 'literary criticism' itself. I'll not detail the subsequent stages of the English assimilation process now, except to say that the focal figure is no longer Barthes but Lacan; Althusser has remained central, if only through his epigones, but I'll come back to him later. It's Lacan that interests me for the moment. I want to raise three interlinked questions.

First, have or had 'ontological' issues been, in fact, erased? One of the figures who still remains unassimilated in England is Jacques Derrida, and it's not difficult to see why. Derrida has, over the years, exposed the 'onto-theological' elements in the work of Saussure, Levi-Strauss and the great Jacques himself (Lacan, and Rousseau). In other words, Derrida has consistently probed the implicit 'idealism' of the whole range of inquiries founded upon 'semiotics'. (In addition, of course, it's a bit difficult to read Derrida if you've never worked on the Greeks, and classics has been a dead subject for years in England. But that's by the way.)

I won't either summarise or assess Derrida's critiques now, because my main point here is independent of the correctness or other-wise of his various 'readings'. My main point now is that Derrida is a 'philosopher' deeply influenced by and indebted to Heidegger, and it is in terms of a strategy developed from and against Heidegger that Derrida operates; it's partly because of that, that Derrida has been able to disclose in Lacan's project its own 'philosophical' and ultimately 'metaphysical' underpinnings, and ambitions, since 'behind' Lacan's reading of Freud is the heritage of that partly Heideggerian reading of Hegel proposed by Kojeve in the 1930S. But in England Heidegger remains almost totally absent from the theoretical debate. What I'm suggesting is that without a real encounter with the problems posed by Heidegger and after him Derrida, any assimilation of Lacan is more or less open to the charge of not having escaped 'metaphysics', of still, even if in a displaced mode, dealing with 'ontological' issues. I'll come back to the issues later, and why they're dangerous. I want to go back to Anderson on Leavis now.

My second question concerns Anderson's '68 analysis: was his thesis about the 'totalising centre' of European culture correct and, correspondingly, was his location of Leavis correct? I'd suggest myself that from the 1920s to the 1940s neither classical marxism nor classical sociology were really at the 'centre' of the European intellectual terrain. Both marxism and sociology were in fact transmuted into philosophies and only in that transmutation were they able to figure within the central intellectual debate, at the defining core of which was the philosophical lineage of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre—and, arguably, the single most influential figure in that debate for the twentieth century has been Heidegger.

For two generations of intellectuals 'Marxism' was reformulated in a latent dialogue and contestation with a Heideggerian reading of Hegel, first in Kojeve, then in Sartre. The phenomenon of 'Western Marxism' takes its shape from that dominance of 'philosophy'. (Incidentally,

something similar seems to be happening to Freud's work now: psychoanalysis is reshaped as a philosophy; what's common to both castrations is the disappearance of any real concern with either marxism or psychoanalysis as concrete practices.)

I can't offer details of this whole movement here; they would include, just as an indication, the transmutation of classical sociology into hermeneutics, in Dilthey, and then into epistemology in Levi-Strauss, the intellectual filiations between Dilthey and Lukacs, the latent dialogue between *Being and Time*, *History and Class Consciousness*, and, eventually, Lukacs's own *Ontologie* (Goldmann's lectures on Heidegger and Lukacs make a stab at sorting this out), the critique of Heidegger by Adorno in *Jargon of Authenticity* but also the pull of Adorno's own *Negative Dialectics*, the influence of Heidegger on Bultmann and through him the whole development of twentieth-century theology leading through to the 'political theology' of Moltmann, Metz, Ratzinger—the last two being influenced by Rahner, whose own first book was heavily Heideggerian, etc., etc.

One reason for not going into detail is that the central problems of that philosophical assimilation of marxism are still legible in today's marxist Lacanians and we can come back to them in a moment. But the other aspect of the question can now be clarified.

If Leavis, as Anderson argued, occupied the absent centre in England, was it so peculiar that he should? Anderson, interestingly, offers no explanation as to *why* Leavis did occupy that centre, except to remark that his claims for 'English' as the 'centre of humane studies and the university' should be seen 'not as a reflection of megalomania on the part of Leavis, but as a symptom of the objective vacuum at the centre of the culture'. That 'symptom' is a characteristic psychoanalytical-structuralist metaphor of the time, which leaves us without much explanatory illumination.

Anderson does make two comments which, if followed through, might have begun to help. 'The paradox of this great critic', he says, 'is that his whole *oeuvre* rested on a metaphysic which he could never expound or defend', and 'when challenged for the rationale of his critical statements, Leavis always replied that they did not properly speaking have an affirmative but an interrogative form; the latent form of all literary criticism was: "This is so, is it not?".' Anderson calls this interrogative technique of Leavis's criticism an 'epistemology' and says that it 'demands one crucial precondition: a shared, stable system of beliefs and values. Without this no loyal exchange and report is possible. If the basic formation and outlook of readers diverges, their experience will be incommensurable.'

I think Anderson's terms 'epistemology' and 'metaphysic' are both misleading, and I'll try and say why, starting from that notion of the 'interrogative form' of criticism. What Anderson doesn't mention is that 'This is so, isn't it? ' invites and expects the answer 'Yes, but... '. (A point often made by Leavis himself—his practice arose out of a change in the social relations of the educational apparatus, which this balance of responses indicates and embodies: criticism too is a practice before it is a theory.)

Implicit in that exchange is a complex notion of language, and it is not so much on a 'shared, stable system of beliefs and values' that Leavis based his actual critical practice as on a 'shared' language; for Leavis, the 'basic formation' of all readers is given by language; language is both the object of the exchange (in both senses)—the 'words on the page' —and the precondition of the exchange, not simply in the sense that 'I gotta use words when I talk to you', but in the more complex Leavis sense that only an intimate inwardness to the English language, as shaped by its 'living speech' and concentrated in its literature, can 'qualify' one to take part in that exchange; 'doing criticism' is, in a profound sense, learning a language. That a particular language is the historical bearer of 'beliefs and values' (and restricts the possibility of certain beliefs and values) would

certainly not be disputed by Leavis, but Anderson's emphasis on 'beliefs and values' at the expense of the central and passionate concern with language in its operation distorts Leavis's relation precisely to that Wittgensteinian 'linguistic philosophy' with which Anderson contrasts it—remember that Leavis regarded his mate Wittgenstein as having a 'naive' view of language.

And it also obscures a fundamental affinity between Leavis and that real focus of European thought: Heidegger. For the concern that increasingly dominates Heidegger's work, from the early 19305 onwards, is language, language as the 'house of Being', language as the domain of poets, language as the crucial path to what is called thinking, key-words as the recoverable traces of the pre-Socratic, the pre-metaphysical. (It is, of course, in that Heideggerian preoccupation with the *Ursprung* of language, of the *logos*, that a great deal of Lacan's own way with language is rooted; and, perhaps, Derrida's critique of Heidegger himself in terms of the occluded difference between the written and the spoken may be the best way of penetrating Leavis's fundamental limits.) That Heidegger's whole task, as he sees it, is to bring 'metaphysics' to its end, is one reason why Anderson is also misleading in claiming that Leavis's *oeuvre* 'rested on a metaphysic which he could never expound or affirm'. When Leavis did, in his last years, spell out the kind of 'thinking' he regarded 'literary criticism' as both demanding and provoking, it was precisely to the anti-Cartesian philosophers Michael Polyani and Majorie Grene that he in fact appealed (which is indeed an index of the real poverty of English intellectual life).

But to read that complex, and three-quarter baked, first chapter of *Leavis's The Living Principle: 'English' as a discipline of thought* is to be reminded constantly, of the anti-metaphysical and anti-epistemological concerns of Heidegger—the *ahnung* of both thinkers is remarkably consonant. To quote one of Scotland's few authorities on Heidegger, Fergus Kerr:

> To put the point provocatively and very schematically: most of what Heidegger can do for one, Leavis does as well or better; or, rather, since it is D. H. Lawrence whom he makes accessible and draws on, the creative-critical vision in his oeuvre is our best equivalent to Heidegger's *Seinsdenken*.

Kerr's account of the 'special kind of thinking which Leavis's work exists to promote' offers simultaneously an account of Leavis's reading of a poem and of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* (that term he appropriated from Meister Eckhart, and which is echoed in that other mentor whom Leavis mediates who also captured a term from the Rhineland mystics—Eliot's *Erhebung*). In other words, the 'centre' of English culture, on this reading of Heidegger and Leavis, was not so very different from the 'centre' of European culture.

But that raises my third question, which again has two sides to it: what on earth does Anderson mean by this metaphor, which I've allowed and adopted so far, of 'centre', and why was it 'no accident that in the fifties, the one serious work of socialist theory in Britain—Raymond Williams's *The Long Revolution* —should have emerged from literary criticism, of all disciplines'?

Both the metaphor of 'centre' and the formulation of the account of Williams highlight the method and the limits of Anderson's essay: it is, formally and explicitly, a 'structuralist analysis' of the intellectual map of Europe; historical questions, or any substantial explanation external to the internal trajectories and inter-defining relations of academic disciplines, are compressed to the point of being cursory. But what is a Levi-Straussian 'structure' doing with a 'centre' in the first place? And to say that *The Long Revolution* 'emerged from literary criticism' is to excise a crucial political fact: the whole early history of the very *New Left Review* Anderson was writing in, and the origins of that *Review* in a crisis within, crucially, the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1956.

The two points go together: in Anderson's compressed account of British nineteenth-century history, the emphasis lies on the dominance of a bourgeois-aristocratic fusion which constituted a ruling class which had no need of a totalising theory of its own society; only in one sentence is there a glimmer of a more substantial thesis:

> There were social critics of Victorian capitalism, of course: the distinguished line of thinkers studied by Williams in *Culture and Society*. But this was a literary tradition incapable of generating a conceptual system. The intellectual universe of Weber, Durkheim or Pareto was foreign to the pattern of British culture which had congealed over the century. One decisive reason for this was, of course, that the political threat which had so largely influenced the birth of sociology on the continent—the rise of socialism—did not materialise in England. The British working class failed to create its own political party throughout the nineteenth century. When it eventually did so, it was twenty years behind its continental opposites, and was still quite untouched by Marxism. The dominant class in Britain was thus never forced to produce a counter-totalising thought by the danger of revolutionary socialism.

In that slide from 'the rise of socialism' to 'revolutionary socialism' is hidden a rather large argument, or assumption, which pivots round the twin claim that the British working class 'failed to create its own political party' (as if that was what it ought to have done) and that when it did so 'it' (the party or the class?) was 'still untouched by Marxism' (as if Marxism had the therapeutic powers of a mediaeval monarch).

The implication is that what was fundamentally lacking in Britain was a political party as the bearer of the Marxist intellectual challenge. But then the comparison with Europe would have to be posed rather differently: the claim that

'Marxism' and 'classical sociology' constituted the 'centre' of the European intellectual constellation would have to be unpacked into the claim that the crucial factor in European intellectual life was the presence of, presumably, the various Communist Parties of Europe. (A further, latent implication was perhaps that Anderson would eventually get around to reformulating his analysis in terms of the Gramscian notion of 'hegemony'.)

That such an account *could* be offered is undeniable, but it would raise two issues: the relationship of the intelligentsia to those Communist Parties and the problem of the kind of 'Marxism' to be found within those Parties. In fact Anderson's version of the impact of 'Marxism' on European theory is silent on precisely those two points, since the 'Communist Party' simply does not (and cannot) operate as a factor in his kind of analysis. The nearest we get to explicit mention of the CPs are phrases such as 'flourishing Marxist cultures rose in Germany, Italy and France', or 'the fifties and sixties saw a proliferation of Marxism on the continent: Althusser in France, Adorno in Germany, and Della Volpe in Italy all founded important and divergent schools', or, perhaps most 'symptom-atically', the following: 'Marxism in the twentieth century, after the inevitable delay in its theoretical assimilation within the working-class movement which had been politically won to it, generated a new wave of major theory. '

That the CPs are 'absent' from the analysis doesn't mean that they're not taken for granted, of course. But one might suggest a rather different reason for this surely rather curious silence (involving periphrastic formulations like those quoted). Really to examine the relation between 'Marxism' and the European Communist Parties would be to ask some rather harsh questions about those CPs in the light of 'marxism' itself, and really to ask questions about the relation between the European intelligentsia and the CPs would, eventually, be to ask questions again about the relationship between the English 'Marxist' intellectuals,

including the intellectuals of *NLR*, particularly perhaps its editor, and the British CP.

But weren't the origins of *NLR* partly in the break from the British CP of most of its intellectuals? And wasn't that because of the Stalinism of that CP, because of the kind of 'Marxism' it proclaimed, because of the 1956 Soviet 'intervention' in Hungary—but also because, fundamentally, the British 'working-class movement' had *not* been 'politically won' to that CP, let alone its marxism? And incidentally, it's perhaps still worth remarking that 1968—the year of Anderson's essay—was not a particularly happy year for the European CPs anyway, especially in France and Czechoslovakia. I can't go into why the PCF 'failed' in France (or the PCI stumbled a year later in Italy), but at least it's worth asking why the CPGB 'failed' to hold its own intelligentsia, and, perhaps, later, why the British working class 'failed' to 'create its own political party throughout the nineteenth century' and hasn't been particularly 'won to' the CPGB—or any 'revolutionary socialist party'—in the twentieth century.

I said that 'Stalinism' was one internal and external reason for the 'break' in 1956. That break wasn't an 'epistemological' break; it was fundamentally a 'moral' break, as anyone who reads the back sections of issues of *Modem Quarterly* for 1953 to 1955 can discern, or who even glances at *The New Reasoner* for 1956-7 can easily see. The central figures in that break were John Saville and E. P. Thompson, both working historians precisely concerned with nineteenth-century British working-class movements. One of them was soon to write, in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963):

> I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'Utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity. . . Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own history; and, if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties.

Put that now famous formulation alongside two poems published in Poland in the 1950s, at a time when the only literature officially encouraged was 'concentration camp' literature:

> History's skeletons are recorded in round figures.
>
> A thousand and one becomes just a thousand.
>
> The odd one might never have existed.

And:

> that old woman who
>
> leads a goat on a string
>
> is more necessary
>
> and more precious
>
> than the seven wonders of the world
>
> whoever thinks and feels
>
> that she is not necessary
>
> is guilty of genocide

It's difficult not to read both the historian's comments and the poets' lines as oblique judgements, also, on the era of Stalin.

It's also easy to see why, years later, E. P. Thompson chose Leszek Kolakowski, a hero of the second Polish October, as the formal recipient of his *Open Letter*. In the year of that Polish October, that partial replay of the Budapest October of 1956 and partial rehearsal of the Prague spring of 1968, Raymond Williams, in *Culture and Society* quoted a passage from an essay entitled 'Democracy':

> We cannot say that all men are equal. We cannot say A = B. Nor can we say that men are unequal. We may not declare that A+B = C. . . One man is neither equal nor unequal to another man. When I stand in the presence of another man, and I am my own pure self, am I aware of the presence of an equal, or of an inferior, or of a superior? I am not. When I stand with another man, who is himself, and when I am truly myself, then I am only aware of a Presence, and of the strange reality of Otherness. There is me, and there is another being. . . There is no comparing or estimating. There is only this strange recognition of present otherness. I may be glad, angry, or sad, because of the presence of the other. But still no comparison enters in. Comparison enters only when one of us departs from his own integral being, and enters the material mechanical world. Then equality and inequality starts at once.

The essay quoted by Williams is by Lawrence and can lead us back to Leavis and Heidegger, and through them to a further two-fold question: why did Heidegger and Leavis provide the fundamental intellectual 'alternatives' to 'Marxism' on the continent and in England, and why does the British working class so consistently fail to produce or support a 'revolutionary socialist party'?

We can now ask, if 'most of what Heidegger can do for one, Leavis does as well or better', what can these two figures 'do for one'—which is one way of asking a question Anderson doesn't, finally, ask: why should the various modulations of Heideggerian thought have proved so attractive to the European intelligentsia, and why should Leavis have achieved such a peculiarly ambivalent status and stature in English 'culture'? One obvious clue is visible in the terms of that passage from Lawrence (whose '*oeuvre* is our best equivalent to Heidegger's *Seinsdenken*'). At a superficial level, both Heidegger and Lawrence can be appropriated by those who believe, or want to believe, that the central conflict in the twentieth century is between 'my

own pure self' and 'the material mechanical world', between the integral individual and the 'forces' that want to 'reduce' the individual to a unit, a cipher, a faceless number, a mere letter A or B or C. In both Heidegger and Leavis there is an explicit 'attack' on what Heidegger calls 'technology' and what Leavis calls the 'technologico-Benthamite civilisation'.

The nuances needn't detain us here—the real complexity of Heidegger's notion of *Gelassenheit*, or the significance of Leavis's coupling of technology and Bentham (that 'genius in the way of bourgeois stupidity'—Marx). Such nuances are lost in the process of banalisation. What undergirds such banalising appropriation, however, is the 'real' and personal 'experience' of the appropriators, which is the 'experience', precisely, of a 'technologically' dominated world in which the 'individual' feels his or her life to be shaped by the impersonal, the mechanical. I needn't rehearse the familiar ideological themes. Nor need I elaborate the ideological version of the 'alternative' to this society: the vivid picture of regimented 'Soviet Civilisation' that has haunted the European press for decades. It's all too tediously familiar, and the 'illusions' are apparent.

But there is a peculiar twist to the history of those 'analyses' of 'Western industrial society' and 'Communist Russia' (or more recently 'drably conformist China'). Faced with this long-established, deeply entrenched and well-cultivated fear and anxiety about the 'threat to the individual' in both 'Western' and 'Eastern' Europe, what current Marxist theories of an Althusserian or Lacanian variety are actually seen to be offering (and not only in their 'banalised' forms?) is precisely the eradication of the 'subject', the 'reduction' of the individual to a 'bearer' of a position within the relations of production, or within the chains of discourse, and all this in a style of abstruse technicism and in the name of 'science'.

To put it crudely, if one 'marxist' reaction against Stalinism took the form of a moral emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual, one 'marxist' reaction against that moral humanism looks like a 'theoretical' spelling out of

precisely the (moral) premisses of 'Stalinism' and of 'industrial capitalism'. I put it that way to emphasise the practical, the political difficulties in the way of offering this brand of marxism, in any generally accessible form, as the 'revolutionary theory' for a working class in an epoch scarred by concentration camps, genocide, and industrial and military dragooning into what are seen as huge homogenised 'masses'. The 'lived experience' of this period has been dominated for working-class people precisely by the fear of and resistance to being 'reduced' to a mere 'letter' in the insistent chains of some impersonal 'discourse' or imperialist 'system'.

Obviously, to put it that way is to traduce rather than merely simplify, but I'm trying to take something like a historian's view from the future, in which the general shape of a moment is simplified to its essentials. I suspect, in other words, that that paradox will one day be the most apparent feature of the current relation of 'marxist theory' to 'the working class movement'. Meanwhile, I need to take the whole problem more 'seriously', I agree. I suppose I do need to say a bit more about why I don't myself find Lacanian Althusserianism very attractive, or very rewarding intellectually—except as a fascinating intellectual game—and it's certainly nice to find punning back in favour after Lacan (you know the type: Lacan can, Kant cudn't, Foucault — oh!? Derridada, etc.). Anyway, there are two aspects to my disquiet. Both will take some time to spell out, so go to sleep if you like for a while.

The first is a more theoretical objection, and focusses mainly on Lacan; the second is more directly political, and has more to do with Althusser. My first argument draws on two thinkers deeply influenced by Heidegger, Derrida and Alan Blum (not very well known here?), and also on some facets of Althusser and Lacan themselves; but I think it's my own argument in the end. I'll put it as simply as I can, using a very simple contrast to begin with.

Anyone who reads Plato and Aristotle is struck by two immediate differences between their works (as we've inherited them). Aristotle's works are 'systematic', characterised by a logical ordering, progression, and arrangement into clearly divided and sub-divided arguments, which combine together to unify the overall argument of each treatise and to establish the sequence of steps whereby that argument moves from its clearly stated initial problem or topic to its clearly stated conclusions. The treatises, though they were probably lectures at some time, have a 'written' form (preserved perhaps through students' notes). Whatever the particular merits or defects of Aristotle's actual arguments, the intention of these works is clearly to provide a tightly interlocking system of inquiry, governed throughout by the rules of logic—Aristotle's own treatise on 'logic' being a key treatise.

Plato's works have a different structure and form. Though they were clearly written, they have the form of 'spoken' dialogues. And their structure is clearly not systematic in the sense in which Aristotle's are. Rarely are all the facets of a question or topic followed through in such a way that the reader feels that all the logical possibilities have been considered. The device of having the interlocutors 'agree' tends to open a space for the reader, at each moment of 'agreement', to want to interject his own unmet objection: 'Yes, but... '.

Such immediate comparisons need, of course, to be elaborated and qualified. Though Plato's dialogues are structured by a process of incremental agreement between the interlocutors, there is rarely, if ever, completely shared agreement by the end of the dialogue: some of the speakers may have left, others stopped contributing, others remain unconvinced, or there may in any case be no clear conclusion arrived at to the original problem posed in the dialogue. Yet at the same time a careful plotting or orchestration of each dialogue is apparent; the 'end' is already 'known' to the author.

In the case of Aristotle, though each treatise has a clear central line of argument, there are constant 'objections' which are not answered in the course of the treatise but are despatched for suitable treatment to another treatise. Yet the treatises taken as a whole do not seem to have any progressively ordered relation to each other; the familiar order of the volumes in the Oxford edition, say, beginning with the 'logic' and ending with the 'poetics', gives a re-assuring sense of a clear starting-point and a 'sensible' order for study—until we actually begin to read the volumes, and find the cross-references multiplying. Admittedly, the crucial, underpinning treatises do seem to be the *Logic* and the *Metaphysics*, but which of these two guarantees the other? And anyway isn't logic one of the uses of language, which is treated in the *Rhetoric*, and doesn't the *Metaphysics* start from statements about the senses, about the human animal? Etc. In any case, don't many of the treatises begin with a summary of his predecessors' arguments, which provide an agreed starting-point, so wouldn't we have to read them first—wouldn't we at least have to read Plato first ? So, where do we begin?

We can generalise the case of Aristotle in two crucial respects. Insofar as any argument is 'valid', it has to be so according to a 'logic'; but what makes the 'argument' of that 'logic' 'valid'? And if a 'system' of thought has no starting-point except outside itself, we cannot rely on its systematicity unless we can also rely on its starting-point, but that involves either an appeal to 'authority' or to another 'system'. The general direction of such comments is presumably familiar. My basic point, in this context, is that a 'theoretical' or 'scientific' system appeals to or includes a 'logic'. But given the 'crisis of logic', which has developed in the last hundred years, from Boole through Frege to Gödel, any theoretical system today is fundamentally unguaranteeable, as a theoretical system, including especially axiomatic systems (cf. the peculiar implications of Gödel's Theorem).

Yet the implicit and sometimes explicit direction of the Althusserian trend is precisely to offer an axiomatic theoretical ('scientific') system of 'knowledge'. Any such attempt finally transforms itself, necessarily, into an appeal to 'authority', normally, these days, an appeal to the authority of a text (so the footnotes multiply). In practice, few even among the most dedicated 'theorists' around today have the energy, or competence (training), to pursue their own debts back through the interminable chain of authorities, of texts. In any case such a project would, would it not, be a search for that transcendental signifier ruled out of play by Lacan and by Althusser. One fashionable response to this classic dilemma has been to treat the chain of texts (of signifiers, of discourse, of language) as an endless chain, a Mobius Strip impossible in principle ever to leave or ever fully to traverse; the effort of the 'theorist' or 'scientist' thereby becomes (in Barthes's words) merely to 'connect to the historical chain of discourses, the progressus of discursivity'. But if the project of systematisation is, by its own account, bound to 'fail', why does the effort continue to be made?

Such a question invites an answer from the camp of Plato. The opposing (yet complementary) view would appear to affirm the transcendental signifier, the originator of discourse, the subject of thought, the expressive speaker, the 'I'. When Plato says that thought is the conversation of the soul with itself, we can all (presumably) pounce. But attend rather to what Plato does, as writer. It is not Plato who 'says' that in the dialogues. Plato constructs a conversation not in his soul but in his writing, a conversation between characters. (And remember that Lawrence criticised him for not really making them characters.) But why does Plato choose that method? One account would say, because it allows him to explore a 'moral' notion of 'truth' or 'knowledge': the reader is to grasp the relation between the (moral, ethical) 'character' of each speaker and the tenacity of his search for the truth; Socrates's main virtue then is perseverance. Maybe.

What I, however, want to generalise out of Plato's method is a notion of differences. There is already available the notion of '*différance*'—Derrida's term for the endless deferment of 'meaning', the hunt-the-slipper game of signification where each signifier turns into a signified in turn as we hunt the elusive traces of an 'always-already-no-longer-where-you-sought-it-now' of 'meaning'. But '*différance*' merely extends, endorses, and elaborates the paradox of Aristotle's inter-textual cross-referring 'system'. At the core of '*différance*' is the materiality of the sign, the 'precedence' of 'script' over 'speech' (it's not simply a matter of which order do you actually put the books on the shelf in). That 'materiality' of the sign has now, of course, become itself a 'sign' of 'materialism', and therefore of 'marxism', for some of our Althusserian-Lacanian semioticians; and in delight at this magic allegiance a metaphor is let loose: if the text is 'material', the 'author' is a mere fiction, or function, or functionary, a name on the spine, a construct of the ideology of the idealist expressive self; the 'death of the author' is proclaimed gleefully despite protestations from numerous corpses, their only remaining function to be spineless extras in a new epic, the *morte d'auteur*, written by scripts and directed by trends. But both the author and the ideology of the self remain stubbornly, if rather sullenly, on the set, ineradicable old hands.

The torsions I have in mind are plainly written in the following text, from a decently obscure journal called *New Blackfriars* (January 1977):

> It's of the essence of the ideological that in speaking, in constituting myself as a subject, I must necessarily repress, remain in ignorance of, the very determinants of my discourse—determinants which are visible only to science, to that science which is psychoanalysis. As I speak—'I', the coherent historical subject Terry Eagleton, it—the unconscious—speaks through me, constantly disturbing and displacing my discourse. I am a subject only because I continually strive to centre myself in a discourse which continually decentres me;

> struggling to become master of my words, striving to see myself as the authentic source and origin of my meaning, I'm continually confronted by those gaps, absences, contradictions and conflicts within my discourse which betray the determining presence within it of the ideological, of the unconscious. These already put me in position, ascribing to me a set of functions I can't escape, at the very moment my discourse struggles to deny this fact by its apparent 'naturalness', its apparent susceptibility to my subjective control, its 'obviousness' and spontaneity.

Further in the same piece:

> It is important to see first of all that the validity of my discourse doesn't depend on me as a subject: that, precisely, is the delusion of ideology, that what's valid is valid because of its rootedness in the experience of the subject. Quite the contrary: validity, truth, science can emerge only by breaking that fatal complicity between the subject and his discourse, by the subject removing himself from any idea of being author of his discourse, recognising that, if he's to speak truly, scientifically, he must become no more than the bearer of certain conceptual categories whose validity depends in no way on himself. If what I say in this paper is to be scientifically correct, then I must become no more than the 'space' within which a certain play of conceptual categories is brought into being. I must break the complicity between myself and my discourse, which is never fully possible but which I can always strive towards, more or less successfully.

I suppose one could remark, affectionately, that this does rather sound like a mediaeval Rhineland mystic striving humbly to become the emptied space in which the Divine being can definitively whisper the truth—which may indicate something about mediaeval mysticism: could *kenosis* be a scientific procedure, I wonder?

But it's probably more useful to ask what *guarantees* the 'validity, truth, science' that is to 'emerge' by 'breaking' that 'fatal complicity'. It would seem peculiar to claim, for example, that 'science' will 'emerge' by the 'subject' 'removing himself from any *idea* of being author of his own discourse'. Is that 'idea' merely a *parapraxis*, the unconscious speaking through the discourse? If so, the unconscious here speaks in idealist accents (or maybe the unconscious can itself commit the occasional *parapraxis*): removing the idea of gravity doesn't allow levitation to 'emerge' (unless you're a mediaeval mystic!). Later in the same article the text says:

> The subject can't know the discourses which produce him, the deep structure and laws of the social formation, because the very process of being constituted as a subject involves the repression of that discourse, the misrecognition of those laws of the mode of production.

One might here ask, if the subject doesn't know, why or what does 'know' that 'the subject' doesn't know? Does the unconscious know? Or perhaps 'marxism' knows? But does marxism know that it knows? Or perhaps marxism knows that 'it' knows? Or perhaps it knows that marxism knows—or doesn't know? We've been in this hole before, a long time ago.

Most of Eagleton's article is taken up with an eloquent rendition of the Freud-Lacan variations on the 'way in which the category of the subject is constructed only on the basis of a repression of the determinants which went into its making'. This may seem to mean no more than that a concert pianist is ill-advised to think about carpentry while performing a Beethoven *adagio*. But clearly the text means more: the 'crux of this [repression?], of course, is the Oedipus complex', it says, in which the 'relation of unreflective unity' the baby lives with its mother is 'shattered by the recognition of difference, which is the inruption of the father into the mother-child relation'. The familiar chain follows: penis, lack, desire, the strings of absences and differences that constitute signification.

This beautifully clear article—Eagleton's very individual style at its best, a vivid lucidity—reproduces two strategies characteristic of the whole 'school' he here (re-)presents. One is the return to the Oedipus complex, to an originating explanation, without any fully intelligible account of why that structure of repression is so peculiarly persistent (the concept of the 'unconscious' stands in for such an account in this text), and, secondly, an admirable self-reflexiveness on the 'position' of the 'author', but no reflection on the physical, material situation of the speaker (the text originated as a paper to a small conference). By that I mean that Eagleton speaks of 'the science of psychoanalysis' as 'the science of what happens when the material body, equipped with its libidinal drives, is inserted into language', and as 'concerned with the utterly devastating consequences which ensue when the material body is inserted into language; for the body is never at home in language.' That repeated present tense, 'is inserted', seems actually to operate, in the text, as a past tense: the material body *was* 'inserted into language' at a traumatic moment, the recognition of (sexual) difference.

But isn't the 'recognition of difference' a continuing feature of being in the same room as any body else, precisely because there are two different bodies (or more, at a conference, say) in the room, materially distinct, spatially differentiated, and formally different? And it's because each body is 'equipped with' a set of eyes and ears and a mouth, as well as 'libidinal drives', that the 'recognition' of each by the other is necessarily different, formally different, from the 'recognition' of each of itself (or of itself by each). The other body is necessarily registered as 'different' from this body by this body. To speak to someone else is always to speak from a different material 'position': the location of the mouth requires it. But what does this—fairly obvious and pretty basic—material difference have to do with the *différance* of signification, the problem of knowledge and the 'ideology of the subject' ?

To try and make it clear, I want to pick up one of George's notions. He suggested that the structure of ideology was that of a double-bind, since a double-bind has a structure that makes a relationship or distribution of power the 'premise' of a 'logic'. He also said that he thought that 'capitalism' was shown as having the same double-bind structure in Marx's account in *Capital*. He then suggested that the reason (certain) 'ideologies' weren't simply 'mis-perceptions' of the real world but 'partial perceptions', was that they had a concrete 'premise' for their self-contradictory 'logics' in the actual 'power' that the sexist or racist stood to lose by changing his material practice (leaving the field or changing it) in order to resolve the antinomies in his 'ideologic'. Well, I'm not too happy with that way of analysing the problem.

Let me worry it out by looking at George's two comments on language. He said that 'to be "white" means, in this world, now, to have the power that comes from being white'. Now I agree that 'being white' in a society ruled by apartheid is to be, by that very fact, privileged. But the rule can only 'make sense' as a rule because 'to be "white" ' *also* means 'to be white', to have a different skin-colour from blacks. That difference is, very much, a matter, literally, of perception, a recognition of physical differences; that such perception is shaped, modified, sharpened, by a whole culture is clear—the Guatemalan gaucho or Colombian campesino seeing fifty-seven shades of brown in a horse's hide, etc., because the colour of a horse's skin makes a material difference in that kind of agricultural economy. But the double-signification of 'white', its operating as a signifier within one system and as signified in another, means that the informal 'logic' of racism has three terms, not two, which operate in a syllogism of confirmation, roughly:

I am white; he is black;

therefore: I must be 'White'.

What happens is that one kind of difference operates to confirm (and justify) another kind of difference. (The 'effect of the real' in literary or cinematic mimesis is achieved by a rather similar doubling of different codes.) That operation does have its 'major premise' in the actual distribution of power, in the social relations of production in the society; but it has its 'minor premise' in the existing social language, which makes available that double-signification of 'white'/"White"; that use of 'white' is, of course, an imposition, a rule of the language created by familiar processes, in law, education, the media, etc., all thereby serving—in their very use of the language—the specific interests of 'whites', though of some whites more than of others, etc. Once that 'super-imposition', that double-signification, of white is established, 'confirmation' is easily available as a slippage-within-tautology ('white is White'), or as the confirmatory self-description ('I am white'—a fatal complicity of subject and discourse). But then, in order to describe oneself physically as white but to refuse the ideological self-attribution of 'White', you need to make an explicit disclaimer: 'I mean I'm white only in a skin sense' (which of course you never are only). This distinction is, interestingly, easier to make in writing, by establishing typographical differences between the two senses. It's at the point where you need, politically need, a clearly articulable distinction between the two usages, that an account of the processes which constitute(d) that 'equation' becomes necessary also, in order to be able to think the difference and in order to be able to combat the confirmatory tautology if asserted by another. An example struck me the other day: the late Jomo Kenyatta once said in an interview, in the days of Mau-Mau, 'The British press have tried to paint me as black as possible.'

——Sorry! Forget all that. Scrub it out. Let me try again. Terribly sorry: lost me way a bit. I'll go back a few pages and start again. In the immortal words on the side of the grain-

lifter: 'If at first you don't suck seed, try drier grain'——
Where was I, then? Yes:—

To try to make it clear, I want to pick up another theme in Eagleton's argument. Freud, as he rightly points out, is a deeply tragic thinker, because death (the death drive) threatens the whole enterprise. Eagleton allows the 'death-instinct' a momentary presence in his Lacanian re-write:

> At the very heart of my discourse is a radical loss, for discourse is nothing but difference and absence; and just as the child, terrified by its first recognition of sexual difference, of the 'loss' of castration, the 'mutilation' of the mother, repressed this knowledge and believes contradictorily that all people have penises and some do not, so I, the adult, am continually tempted to repress that ceaseless movement of absence and difference—that movement of desire—through which my language conducts me, by erecting a fetish [*sic*], by fixing myself in some security as a subject through relating myself to some fetishised object which will be the guarantor of my security, of my being in place, of my imaginary, ideological relation of unity with the world. What I can't accept is that the world is independent of my consciousness, that the language I speak betrays, at every point, that it is speaking me; what I can't accept is that the world is independent of me, because that means I can die. As I hurtle from side to sign, [*sic*] caught up in that process of desire which language itself instigates, I want always to fold myself in some utter fixed fullness of sense and identity; driven as I am along that chain of absences which is language, I fight to return to some primordial plenitude of sense, some moment in which I cannot die because the world depends upon me. I'm torn, constantly, between the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic'—between believing that my discourse is my discourse, and finding constantly that it's already structured, it already offers positions to me, which displace what I say, which outrun my conscious control.

> As the text of my speech unrolls, as I position myself as the author-subject of it, I find constantly that beneath the 'coherent' discourse I'm conducting is that true, invisible, scarred and mutilated discourse which is the unconscious, which is the sum of words which invade and contradict and escape all I say.

I'm not disputing this account, only probing it. Think of the logic of that phrase: 'all people have penises, and some do not'. Such a contradictory 'belief' seems a peculiar one to persist when we know the first part is 'false' in the 'real' world—and if that belief really is ineradicable then the liberation of women indeed faces a prickly future, even a tragic one.

But isn't there an even older, ancient syllogism which it echoes: 'All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore Socrates is mortal'. As a piece of common logic in a textbook that's perfectly sound and acceptable. But in the form, say, 'All animals die; I am an animal; therefore . . '—the logical conclusion is somewhat more difficult to 'accept' (even the minor premise seems to stick in some throats—so does the major one, come to that!). There is always that tiny trace of a refusal, a fleeting urge just to check the conclusion one more time, bend it a little, query the validity of the syllogism, of the logic. The inexorable here seems an insult. All A will B; C is an A; therefore C will B. That's harmless, unless you happen to be the letter C and B means 'die'.

But you don't just *happen* to be C. I'm suggesting that the fundamental 'repression' that shapes discourse is the repression of the knowledge of death, of final absence, the intellectual certainty that I will die, very soon. Because the logic of 'difference' requires the logic of 'same', and what makes us all similar is the body: all bodies die, every body dies. But—says the logic of differences—my body cannot be the same as every body else's, precisely because of the location of the eyes, hands, skin, body, that enforces the recognition of everybody else as everybody else in the first place (I am always in the first place). That fundamental, inescapable, mis-recognition that is not a mis-perception of

the real world isn't (only) rooted in the Oedipal trauma; it persists as long as bodies persist. Which is for ever, within history; but they'll be somebody else soon.

It would be interesting to detour here through mirror-stages, and the intimate intertwinings of sex, bodies and language, and the basis for various 'ideologies' in this difference that superimposes itself. But what interests me at the moment is the effect of this permanent (mis-)recognition on conversation, particularly intellectual conversation, and, eventually, on cognition.

A comment that George made, citing Bateson, may help: that a 'double-bind' has to be a *repeated* experience, a 'recurrent theme' in the life of the victim, rather than a single traumatic event; but that when repetition has created a habitual expectation of double-bind, any one element in the set of ingredients can be enough to 'precipitate panic or rage', that is, for the victim to trigger into play the rest of the double-bind process himself, or on himself.

With that as a guideline, an Ariadne thread into speculation, consider the following suggestion: that *any* attempt to advance a coherent, logical, systematic argument acts, however latently, as the trigger for a double-bind process, both for the speaker and for the addressee. (In parenthesis: perhaps, George, Bernard Lonergan's term 'counter-position' might be better than 'double-bind'—a counter-position occurs between what you say and what you are; but let's stick with 'double-binds'.)

There are various relatively superficial reasons why this should be so. For example, that fundamental mis-(re)cognition of differences needs 'confirmation' by the recognition of other differences, and since it is the intelligence (my relation to the shared language which articulates logics) that tells me that I am the same as the other, one tactically useful confirmation of differences occurs when the intelligence (my intelligence) can demonstrate its own difference from the other's intelligence, by a difference of opinion (a different relation to the shared

language, a contra-diction), by saying something different, in content as well as form (everything I say is different in form, formally different, since 'I' say it).

But the most amusing reason why coherence triggers double-bind (and thereby contra-dictory discourses) is that at the heart of coherence lies the very logic of same / difference itself (or same / other), the principle (starting-point, axiom) of non-contradiction, of 'A is A', which also includes the logic of 'A is *not* B', but also includes the logical possibility of 'A is (a) B'—which therefore allows for the Socratic syllogism that tells me I die. To put the point in quasi-Gödelian terms: any completely systematic structure of propositions is capable of generating the exact syllogism which 'proves' that I die—which I don't want to prove, and which undermines my system.

It is the refusal, the repression, the negation, of *that* which finally speaks in the evasions, avoidances, of any final coherence, which ensures that anything any body says will be contra-dieted, some time, since secreted at the heart of any assertion, any discourse, is a proof of my death. Which is why I am also drawn on to the path of, some time or other, contradicting what 'I' have said myself. Which is, I'm suggesting, the cunning reason for the endless chain of discursivity, the interminable path of thinking—or what is called thinking: the *progressus* of para-doxes, the history of dogmas.

There is a further movement secreted in this *progressus*: that a single contra-diction, a contrary opinion, has to be defended, elaborated, made coherent by further, confirmatory, contra-dictions in the dialogue with the other; therein lies systematisation, de-systematisation, re-systematisation. If pursued, such a movement re-makes logic itself, throws the logic which coheres coherence into dispute, disarray, re-coherence. So we get that curious bass-line in the polyphonic history of 'ideas': the history of logic(s), the chain of epistemologies, the kaleidoscope of *epistémés*.

To the traces of Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, etc., in this suggestion, might be added, as a mooring-point for our thread, the materialism of Marx: the central contradiction of 'language' lies not within its internal movements but between the social relations of its production (between the others to whom one speaks and writes, of whom one is one) and the material forces of its production (mouths, hands, bodies—those bodies one does not share, except occasionally, mouth to mouth or in peculiar positions). But marxism is not a philosophy of language; it is not, indeed, a philosophy. A marxist would ask of that account another account: of the conditions of its production. Why has that complex combination (or similar, different ones) of logic, psychoanalysis, and 'materialism' come into such intellectual prominence in the late twentieth century? And why does it find its focus as well as its articulation in the often-punning play of language? I don't know; but a future marxist historian (if there are any) might well single out two features of this epoch.

The crucial development in the forces of production in the last thirty-five years has been the development of nuclear power. But the problem that nuclear power has posed, even in its un-developed state, from Hiroshima in 1945 to Cuba in 1961 to Windscale in 1978, has been two-fold: the potential death of everybody (all men are mortal—at the touch of a button) and the stalemate of political struggle (the Cold War, the long-term political implications of Windscale, etc.). A marxist who 'knows' that the class-struggle has never stopped short of revolutionary war has to face—if he or she is consistent—two possible prospects: endless deferment of that revolutionary war because of the risks of nuclear catastrophe, or an attempt to 'take power' which will 'succeed' too late (power as always-already-no-longer-where-you-sought-it-now)— not simply in the sense of that endless chase across the globe hunting and combatting the always-retreating, always-effective, absent/present control of international monopoly capitalism, but, more tragically, in terms of a moment of 'panic or rage', of misjudgement, of 'accident', as the threat to the identity of a class (structured

on threatened diminishing differences) approaches even imaginary success.

Such thoughts must arise in any struggle for theoretical strategic coherence, any systematic scenario of 'revolution', any thinking through of political directions. But such thoughts have to be refused, repressed, forgotten, consigned back into the-hopefully imaginary. Yet the generation that came to political awareness in the 1960s—who were born into a nuclear world—were the first in history to inherit the dilemma of global strategy in so acute a form, as so immediate a necessity, as the only context in which to think. Secreted at the heart of that dilemma is the impossible vision of simultaneity, the instant of full fusion, a single flash of final meaning: a shooting of all the clocks at once. But given the double-visions superimposed upon each other in that final reel of history, a certain playful yet serious contemplativity, *Gelassenheit*, seems the only possible response to that contra-dictory culmination of technological civilisation: the fission-chain.

Such a (semi-playful) account does not, however, satisfy. The conditions of production are more specific. And since my concern is Britain and the British assimilation of Lacanian—Althusserianism, it is the conditions of distribution that also intrigue me. I suppose one could argue that the peculiar situation of many British marxist intellectuals, old campaigners from the young 1960s, now marooned within the educational apparatus of the stagnant 1980s, has some bearing on the question: that curiously irresponsible position of the State-financed, tenured, pensioned 'radical', who is paid by the labour of others to think; non-productive labour (in the technical sense, of course) always echoes the position of the contemplative Guardian in a slave-society. ... But let that pass, with all nostalgia. Approach it from another direction.

As I write, there are dock-workers picketting the Polaris base in the Firth of Clyde (one Polaris is beyond their reach, 'somewhere at sea'—and an RAF V-bomber crashed, loaded, near Chicago today). Theirs is an 'industrial dispute'.

Navy personnel have already bypassed the picket once already in this fight. (A report on the US Army published yesterday gave the average 'IQ' of volunteers as 80. They too have been used as strike-breakers. *Etc.*) The question on the picket-line is, as it always is, 'What do we do next? ' The 'questions' of class-conflict are, also, immediately practical ones. Answers are always found. But no 'revolutionary socialist party' in Britain seems to have anything like a practical answer to the question: 'What do we do next, and after that? ' My own experience over twenty years is that no new strategic perspectives have been developed by any revolutionary socialist party in Britain within which the 'next tactic' makes sense. Yet the strategic perspectives of previous generations have been subjected to their familiar 'test-cases' and largely found wanting or no longer viable. To 'connect' to the *progressus*, to the historical chain of tactics, to the sequence of local, immediate struggles, is *not* to make sense of the concept of revolution. In Britain in the last twenty years some 'moments' in the history of 'the Left' are vivid and visible, moments when certain lessons were learned: 1974, 1968, 1956. But one is less visible, though important: 1963.

The history of the 'Left' between 1956 and 1963 is marked by a unique conjuncture of the development of a complex 'theoretical' current of non-organised marxists ('Britain's largest unorganised party—the ex-Communist Party') in sympathetic touch with the largest and least 'unpopular' mass campaign of the post-war years, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, with its demonstrations of 150,000 in 1961 and 1962 (slightly larger than the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign demos of the late 1960s). But the Campaign was a moral and not, fundamentally, a political campaign. The task facing any marxist within that current was to try to develop a political analysis that could successfully politicise that single-issue, single-interest campaign. The failure is well-known. But, to remind you, here's Stuart Hall, writing in *Sanity* in May 1963:

> Can a political shape be imposed upon or arise from a movement which contains within its ranks such garden varieties as anarchists, non-violent revolutionaries, proto-Trotskyists, New Left socialists, soft-shoe communists, constituency Labour Party members, renegade liberals, pacifist old-timers, beatniks and vegetarians, *Peace News*, *Solidarity*, *Sanity*, *Anarchy* and *War and Peace*? By any book, the answer should be 'No'. No single flag, no slogan, no ideology, no king, can command the allegiance of so motley an army of the good.

New Left Review, whose first editor was the same Stuart Hall, between 1960 and 1963 was the 'Left' journal which most directly and theoretically agonised over that problem. Here are two accounts of what happened to *New Left Review* in 1963. From David Widgery, *The Left in Britain 1956-1968*.:

> In January 1963, in circumstances which remain mysterious, the journal was purchased by an Old Etonian who proceeded to dismiss the entire editorial board and change the journal in all but name. The commitment to political involvement characteristic of at least the core of the old *NLR* was completely jettisoned and in the first year of the new regime more space was devoted to tenor saxophonists playing in New York than to the British working class in its entirety.

From Edward Thompson, *An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski*

> We reached a point of personal, financial, and organisational exhaustion; and at this moment, the agent of history appeared, in the form of Perry Anderson. We were exhausted: he was intellectually fertile, immensely self-concentrated, decisive. We saw, in a partnership with him and his colleagues, an opportunity to regenerate the review and to recuperate our own squandered intellectual resources. We did not, as it happens, anticipate that the first expression of his

> decisiveness would be to dismiss the review's founders from the board. . . Since taking on editorial control in 1965 Perry Anderson and his colleagues have conducted the review with system, conviction and decision. There was, however, a fracture in the passage from one tradition to another, which was never exposed to principled discussion. It was a very English transition: that is (according to one's viewpoint) gentlemanly and tolerant, or otiose and manipulative.

(One is, incidentally, rather reminded, reading this, of the poor deluded followers of Joanna Southcott.) The incident was 'mysterious' and the 'fracture' (an epistemological break?) was 'never exposed to principled discussion'. Both comments remain, fifteen years on, sadly true. Why?

Let us treat this enigma, this silence, this suppression, as a 'symptom'. Of what? Of a fundamental blockage: the impossibility of extending the moral case against unilateralism into a total political programme and converting 150,000 heterogeneous adherents of the former into disciplined supporters of the latter. I say 'impossibility'. Not exhaustion or incompetence. What would have been involved would have been a revolution *against* the material needs, interests, hopes, expectations, of those who were to make that 'revolution'. Fully to follow through the consequences of unilateralism would have involved a fundamental threat to the material conditions of life of not just the 150,000 but most of the 50 million in Britain—a threat arising not (solely) from 'Soviet aggression' but from economic and other reprisals on us by our erstwhile 'allies'. To align with the 'non-aligned bloc' (the 'programme' of CND's *Freed From Fear* in 1961—the 'nonaligned bloc' being then India, Yugoslavia, Egypt, Ghana, etc.) was a liberal version of the para-doxical demand faced by any revolutionary socialist party in Europe and North America—a 'demand' it would have to make, in the first instance, of its own members.

At the heart, the 'centre', of the strategic-theoretical impasse of the Old New Left was what one might call the 'imperialist differential'—and we have been in that hole before, from around 1850-1880. Labour historians can quarrel over the imperialist bonus to the British working class in those decades (and the related thesis of 'the labour aristocracy'), because the argument can go either way for that period; but that the 'differential' between the metropolitan worker and, say, the Bajan cane-cutter who produces the sugar the British worker puts in his tea (itself produced by Ceylonese plantation-workers on starvation rations) or the middle-class academic puts in his coffee (produced by a Brazilian Indian) —that *that* differential is now immense is undeniable. That the differential arises as one effect of the contradiction between the global material forces of production and the global relations of production may indicate an explanation of the *impasse* faced by any 'revolutionary party' in Britain, but an explanation, a scientific analysis even, doesn't solve the political, strategic *impasse*. (We all know *why* a Labour Government 'failed' to prevent a nationalised international oil company from breaking its own sanctions against Rhodesia.)

But *if* European marxist theory is the theory of the European working class (or six-sevenths of it), it's not surprising, is it, that that theory, too, should have at its 'centre' a self-contradictory impasse, a demand which it 'cannot' articulate, which it has to suppress, to 'lose' in its own endless chains of discourse.

The silence about 'the Party' in Anderson's 'Components' essay may be no more than a local 'symptom' of a certain repressed moment of 'inruption' and rupture in 1963, but that 'moment' may itself be no more than a 'symptom' of a more general repressed discourse in which the key terms that form the 'chain' could be rendered as: 'imperialist differential', 'revolution', 'too late', 'nuclear'. That 'ecology' and 'racism' are also characteristic currents in the Europe of the 1970s bespeaks the same emerging self-

contradictions; when everywhere is in the same chains we are all of us haunted by more or less the same para-praxes.

What is, I am suggesting, characteristic of Lacanian-Althusserianism is that it takes the theoretical *impasse* of European marxism to its point of highest theoretical development so far: into the contradictions of epistemology and the proclamation that:

> The subject can't know the discourses which produce him, the deep structure and laws of the social formation, because the very process of being constituted as a subject involves the repression of that discourse, the misrecognition of those laws of the mode of production.

One might now ask, is it that the subject can't know the 'laws of the social formation' or, rather, can't know the subject's own relation to 'the laws of the social formation', his and her own position within them—which (according to one's viewpoint) might be seen more as that of 'ruler' than of 'subject'? I can see no reason to speak of marxism or psychoanalysis as 'sciences' unless they do provide 'knowledge' of the laws of the social formation and of the discourse of the unconscious (of what the self leaves unsaid and why)—and 'knowledge' that is accessible to knowing subjects, not just me but as many people as possible who resist that knowledge. I can, however, I suspect, see a reason why the subject 'can't' know his or her position, why that position 'has' to be mis-recognised. Terry Eagleton writes: 'I fight to return to some primordial plenitude of sense, some moment in which I cannot die because the world depends upon me.' Perhaps a slight re-writing will make my point: 'I fight to return to some primordial ignorance, some permanent forgetfulness of the fact that I will die because I depend upon the whole world'. Or one can perhaps further re-write thus: 'I struggle to arrive at some moment in which, if necessary, I will die for the world—or at any rate suffer a reasonably drastic change in the way I live now.'

One can read those latent reformulations, decipher that dilemma, equally in the angry but negative expressions of ordinary motorists queuing at empty petrol-stations and in the sophisticated but more positive prison reflections of Régis Debray, a self-analysis that questions the motives for his being in the face of death in an execution cell in Latin America in the first place. I suggest you read his *Journal d'un petit bourgeois entre deux feux et quatre murs*.

Which brings me back to Debray's one-time teacher, Louis Althusser (a fair amount of the *Journal* is concerned with Debray's student formation), and to my second, more political, objection to Althusserian—Lacanianism. I'll be very brief indeed on this one. In fact, all I need to do is suggest that you also read two books by Althusser himself. *Essays in Self-Criticism* and *Montesquieu: Politics and History*—and that you read the first in the light of the second. But as a mere pointer to what I have in mind I'll single out one footnote from *Essays* and put it alongside some quotes from *Montesquieu*. The footnote reads:

> For Marxism the explanation of any phenomenon is in the last instance internal: it is the internal 'contradiction' which is the 'motor'. The external circumstances are active: but 'through' the internal contradiction which they overdetermine.

Bearing that in mind, think of Althusser's own (brilliant) dissection of Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* (published in 1748). Althusser writes that:

> the fundamental antagonism at that time did not counterpose the absolute monarchy to the feudal lords, nor the nobility to a bourgeoisie which was for the most part integrated into the regime of feudal exploitation and profited by it, but the feudal regime itself to the masses subject to its exploitation.

He then notes how those 'masses' slowly forced their way into the consciousness of 'history' and finally into the conceptual apparatus of 'political theory', though not, in fact, into Montesquieu's:

> Not until the appearance of a poor priest from Champagne, like Meslier . . did this 'people', this 'common people' (*bas-peuple*), enter as a *puissance*, first into pamphlets and finally into the concepts of political theory. Before this, it had only an allusive existence theoretically: as it does in Montesquieu himself . . But this fourth *puissance*, this subject of non-knowledge, passion and violence, nevertheless haunts the alliances of the other three [*puissances*: monarchy, nobility, bourgeoisie] as a memory does its loss: by its censorship.

Althusser concludes his analysis by claiming that:

> By a unique historical *volte-face*, a man who looked towards the past seemed to open the door to the future. I believe that this paradox pertains above all to the anachronistic character of Montesquieu's position. It is because he pleaded the cause of an outdated order that he set himself up as an opponent of a political order which others were to make outdated.

At the end of chapter 3, 'The Dialectic of History', Althusser had already remarked that:

> within him another man than the scientist took advantage of this ambiguity. The man of a political party which needed precisely the pre-eminence of the forms over the principles, and wanted there to be three kinds of government, in order that, protected by the necessities of climate, manners and morals, and religion, it could make its choice between them.

Consider now the case of Louis Althusser. *Montesquieu: Politics and History* was published in 1959, and Althusser has clearly moved on, theoretically, from his position then. But he remains, as he has done since 1948, 'the man of a political party'—a Party, the PCF, which has, again and again, wanted merely to 'choose' between 'different kinds of government,

and has 'failed' repeatedly. Perhaps its 'failure', even in its own terms, is intelligible: because that Party itself already stands on the side of an outdated order—and so, almost necessarily, do its members. In the torsions of that 'contradiction', deeply 'internal' to the political strategy of every European Communist Party (though not only the CPs), lies the 'motor' of their 'struggle'—a struggle to avoid the double-bind of 'revolution'.

What is then left, waiting, hopefully, in the wings, at the quiet margins of history and political theory, is that other *puissance*, those masses who live, and die, in their own fourth realm, their own dark world. *Politics and History*, published in the year of the Cuban revolution, of the formation of the NLF in Vietnam, of the last twitches of French terror in Algeria, can perhaps be read now, with hindsight, as a 'symptom' of a deeply persistent dilemma of strategy and direction, of allegiance and viewpoint. A spectre has been haunting European marxism for a long time now: not merely the spectre of *Eurocommunismo*, but the chill spectre of Eurocentrism.

Let me return to England, for a brief conclusion. It may be merely another minor symptom, but if you look down the list of *NLB* books, given in *NLR* 100, among the mere seven out of the first forty not so far reprinted or paperbacked are *Armed Insurrection* (published in 1970—the year armed struggle replaced the politics of People's Democracy in Northern Ireland, a mere hour's flight away) and Lucien Goldmann's *Immanuel Kant*. The second is the more interesting in this context, since Goldmann's argument is that Kant's philosophy is an expression of that 'tragic vision' which articulated the crisis of the bourgeoisie in the revolutionary epoch of the late Enlightenment. Goldmann starts his chapter on Kant's epistemology with an anecdote which may have a certain relevance. The chapter is entitled 'What Can I Know? '

> Kant lays the philosophical foundations for the most profound and radical critique ever made of bourgeois man. Perhaps the reader will allow me to explain how I first came to understand this. It was in a class-room, where I had just been expounding the general principles of Kantian ethics. A pupil delivered a vehement speech against this morality according to which, he said, his father, a most respected citizen, would be an immoral man. This was quite unacceptable to him. When, astonished, I asked him how he had come to that conclusion, the young man explained that his father, a shopkeeper, was every day in contact with a large number of people whom he did not otherwise know and who for him were no more than the means of earning a living and feeding his family. It would never have occurred to him to treat all these unknown people as ends in themselves.
>
> I must admit that I was taken aback by this reply. But my astonishment only increased when, on returning home and leafing through the writings of Kant, I found that Kant's first example of an immoral man corresponded more or less exactly to what my young pupil had said.

I wonder what Goldmann's reaction would have been had his pupil accused him, Lucien Goldmann, not only of being an immoral man for living in accordance with his own philosophy but also of being 'immoral' precisely according to the arguments of that philosophy. I offer this double-bind simply because I find it interesting that Heidegger's *Being and Time* was meant to culminate in an ethics and never did, and so was Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and never did, and that Terry Eagleton's article from which I've been quoting begins with the comment that 'Marxism has had on the whole little to say about morality', but that it is 'in the provisional silence of those who refuse the term "morality" that, perhaps, something of its true meaning may finally emerge'.

That Western Marxism, and indeed European twentieth-century thought generally, has consistently been unable to develop, or refused to develop, a 'morality', may be a mark that 'European Marxism' is now the expression of another 'tragic vision'. Since 'morality' has been so long associated with that dead Queen of the Sciences, Theology, it may be yet another symptom that in his extensive and almost comprehensive survey of European and English intellectual life, in the 'Components' article, Anderson simply omitted any consideration of theology.

Yet as we reflect back upon 'Western Marxism' it seems that theological themes insinuate themselves at many points: Goldmann's major work was on the absent God of Jansenism, *Le Dieu caché*, Walter Benjamin's mind is permeated by an Hebraic awareness of the silence and plenitude that speaks in the Word, the Text, and behind the neo-scholasticism of Althusser himself lies not only the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the *Ethica* of the seventeenth-century Amsterdam Jew, Baruch Spinoza, but also the Neo-Thomism of such mentors of his days in the *Jeunes Etudiants Catholiques* as Maritain and Gilson. Given the complex filiations between a form of theology at the centre of which is the word, the Book, and the peculiar importance of 'Literature' in European culture, it is again perhaps not surprising that, though Anderson's focus in that essay is explicitly on the 'culture' and 'disciplines' which 'provide our fundamental concepts of man and society', he omits 'creative literature' as well as theology.

A Leavis would, of course, say that 'creative literature' provides us with more than 'concepts' of 'man and society', and that we need more than 'concepts'. Such a view might well be dismissed as 'idealist'—and indeed the final target of Anderson's coruscating critique is the residual idealism in Raymond Williams, derived from Leavis; the final footnote of the essay reads:

> The influence of Leavis is discernible in its idealism [*The Long Revolution*]—corrected in much of Williams's later work. Leavis believed that 'to say that the life of a country is determined by its educational ideals is a commonplace'. (*Scrutiny*, No.1. May 1932)

It may then seem ever so slightly ironic that the first quotation in Anderson's own essay is from an article entitled '*Problemes Etudiants*', by Louis Althusser:

> Louis Althusser has recently written that within the general system of higher education 'the number one strategic point of action of the dominant class' is 'the very knowledge students receive from their teachers'. This is the 'true fortress of class influence in the university'; it is by the very nature of the knowledge it imparts to students that the bourgeoisie exerts its greatest control over them.

To believe that even within the educational apparatus it is primarily through 'the very knowledge students receive from their teachers' that class discipline is effected, shows more than residual traces of idealism. But I'd better leave these considerations and, finally, get back to literature and morality. I'm turning this into a lecture, and I don't want to end up doing that!

That comment of Eagleton's about morality is repeated in the last chapter of his book *Criticism and Ideology*, in which he uses the same kind of argument about 'aesthetics' and 'value'. According to Goldmann, of course, a work of literature may, equally with a work of philosophy, be the *most* coherent (and therefore in-coherent, self-contradictory) expression of a 'tragic vision'. Now, you know I'm not very keen on Goldmann's general method, but the idle thought does strike me that the logical outcome of the present spate of Althusserian—Lacanian marxism might well be a novel, or perhaps an instance of what Eagleton somewhere else calls 'that necessarily ironic genre', an autobiography.

But I suppose it's already happened: if literature replaced theology and morality some time around Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*, and criticism replaced literature some time around Leavis's *Education and the University* (with Newman's *Idea of a University* and *Grammar of Assent* somewhere in between), criticism has become literature some time around Barthes's time, with *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* and *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* as the present latest stage in this process without any goals. Of course, we're still faced with the question (which we can refuse) of whether to *read* such texts as those of Barthes, Lacan, Derrida, *as* 'literature', as their own kind of poems or novels—but perhaps that's now a daft question, as you said, George.

Incidentally, that brings me back to the point I was going to make about your comments on Chris's reading of 'The Dedication'. (I haven't forgotten anything else I was going to come back to, have I?) I thought that your idea of reading the 'ideologic' of a text was quite interesting, but it didn't account for the *way* Chris did it. I think what she was actually doing was revealing 'what Leavis can do for you'—if you push him hard enough. There's a very curious notion of language at work, as I said, in Leavis's way of 'reading' a poem: he's very aware of the text, 'the words on the page', as written, yet he also, simultaneously, wants you to read it, often aloud, with all the flexible nuances and rhythms of the spoken voice. I think that's got something to do with his very physical, very bodily, sense of 'literature'—remember that extraordinary Leavis gesture, the two-handed jab to the gut: 'It's down *there*! ' Any rate, if you try to read like Leavis, with that incredible, even frightening attention, you have to somehow 'enter into' the poem—but in the same spirit as that phrase from Blake he was fond of quoting, where Blake says of his own writing:

> Tho' I call them Mine, I know they are not Mine.

Well, I don't know, but I rather think that Chris was just taking that insight to its limits by taking seriously, literally, Herbert's lines about

my first fruits present themselves to thee,

Yet not mine neither.

It's the same problem, even though Herbert's is a theological or onto-theological way of putting it. Maybe there are other ways of really writing, or rather reading, and probing the ideologic of a text may be one. But perhaps in the end we have to recognise that most people read for fun anyway—certainly not to get 'concepts of man and society'. As marxists I think we ought to respect that, at least some of the time. And that notion of respect perhaps has important political implications.

But I've been talking too much. Sorry to have gone rabbiting on. Our Zen Master has been very quiet, I notice. I wonder if he's got anything to add—or is the seminar over? Have you—is it?

*

I: Who? Me? You don't want answers do you? I mean, I've already given you a daft question, haven't I? Do you want a daft answer as well? In any case, judging by what you've just said, Herbert—yes, I was listening—I'd be bound to disagree with all of you, now wouldn't I? I won't even risk giving you another question, but I might add three more quotations, which I don't think any of you quoted, did you? Though you may remember them:

> *Briggs*: So when I left I thought I must do something practical. I decided to bring the price of corn down. A few people eat far too much. So if a few people ate far too little that might balance. Then there would be enough corn and the price would come down. I gave up meat first, then cheese and eggs. I lived on a little porridge and vegetables, then I gave up the porridge and stopped cooking the vegetables.

It was easier because I was living out. I ate what I could find but not berries and nuts because so many people want those and I do well with sorrell leaves and dandelion. But grass. It was hard to get my body to take grass. It got very ill. It wouldn't give in to grass. But I forced it on. And now it will. There's many kinds, rye grass, meadow grass, fescue. These two years I've been able to eat grass. Very sweet. People come to watch. They can, I can't stop them. I'm living in a field that belongs to a gentleman that comes sometimes, and some-times he brings a friend to show. He's not unkind but I don't like to see him. I stand where I am stock still and wait till he's gone.

Claxton: There's an end of outward preaching now. An end of perfection. There may be a time.

I went to the Barbados. I sometimes hear from the world that I have forsaken. I see it fraught with tidings of the same clamour, strife and contention that abounded when I left it. I gave it the hearing and that's all. My great desire is to see and say nothing.

That's the ending of Caryl Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*.

The novel has declined as a coherent genre, not—as is often alleged—because it was the product of the rising bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century and could not survive it. The true reason is that it has disappeared into the abyss between everyday language and the technical discourses inaugurated by Marx and Freud. The sum of objective knowledge within the specialized codes of the human sciences has decisively contradicted and surpassed the normal assumptions behind exoteric speech.

> The result is that a novelist, after Marx and Freud, has either to simulate an arcadian innocence or transfer elements of their discourse immediately into his work. Hence the now entrenched bifurcation between pseudo-traditional and experimental novels. Both are doomed as genres (which does not exclude individual successes). The ingenuousness of the former is always bad faith; the past will never be recreated. The opposite solution—the inclusion of frontier concepts from Freud or Marx within the novel—has no viable outcome either. Ideas cannot be transposed into art without mediation. The missing mediation is—precisely, ordinary language. As long as this is untransformed at base, these concepts remain 'technical' and 'esoteric'. They run against the grain of spontaneous speech. Hence they are strictly unusable for the artist. If they are imported into the novel, they crush it: there have been no successful psychoanalytical tales. The novelist can only forge his art from the material of ordinary language. If there is a radical discordance between this and objective knowledge of man and society, the novel ceases. It has no ground between the naive and the arcane. The gap will only be closed by the reintegration of revolutionary ideas into unreflective linguistic practice, which would make possible a coherent novel once again. Such a change, of course, presupposes a changed society.

That's from another footnote in Perry Anderson's 1968 article 'Components of the National Culture'. You ought to read the rest of it.

> Wahl: But I don't understand how others will re-appear in your discourse . .
>
> Lacan: Look, the main thing is that I don't come a cropper!

That's from Lacan's *Seminaire XI*.

If you like, I'll give you an order instead of a question. For our next seminar, put those three quotations in their most suitable order and be prepared to justify your decision. You may add whatever other quotations you think will bring our discussion up to date, bearing in mind the following developments . . ..

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A lively seminar group argues about the meaning of a short poem by George Herbert, unpacking not only implicit literary, philosophical, and theological issues, but their own explicit political dilemmas. A review of an imaginary book outlines how literary works can often persuade us into unexpected agreement and collaboration. Together, these odd exercises suggest a far-ranging account of the peculiar processes of conversion, religious and otherwise, which sustain and underpin a variety of contemporary ideological positions.

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an absolutely important first-rate book -Terry Eagleton
fascinating, entertaining, . . very impressive - David Lodge
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and attractive - Fred Inglis

New Crisis Quarterly revives the title of a short-lived periodical which published only reviews of wholly imaginary works, which their authors did not have the time to write. NCQ books are offered in the same spirit.